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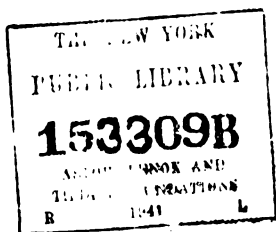


# THE ISLE OF LIFE

## A ROMANCE

BY  
STEPHEN FRENCH WHITMAN  
AUTHOR OF "PREDESTINED"

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
NEW YORK : : : : : 1913



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# THE ISLE OF LIFE

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## CHAPTER I

SEBASTIAN MAURE awoke to great lethargy of brain and body. His eyeballs burned. His skin felt dry and shrivelled. His throat was parched, and irritated by countless cigarettes. He began to cough, weakly, yet with sufficient force to make his head feel as if it were going to explode. Repressing a groan, he rolled over on his back, gazed at the ceiling, and tried to remember where he was.

The previous evening, on reaching Rome, he had alighted at the Grand Hotel, bathed, changed into evening dress, and set out for the Corso. There, in front of Aragno's Café, he had been welcomed back by Marchese Tito di Torredidone, a young Sicilian officer of the Genoa Cavalry, and by Andreas Romanovitch Tcherniaieff, an attaché of the Russian Embassy. With these two he had gone upstairs to the Hunt Club. They had dined there. Afterward, they had played interminable card-games in the outer room. Later, they had certainly met some actresses or opera-singers for supper—perhaps in the Regina Restaurant. . . .

His memory exhausted at this point, he began to inspect his present surroundings, which he was not conscious of having seen before.



The room, its ceiling unusually high, was furnished in jonquil-yellow and mahogany. Everything was expensive-looking, ultra-modern, *chic*.

Whose room could it be? No doubt it was the owner's sleeping-suit that he was wearing, a suit of rose-colored silk so tight for him that the buttons, and half the seams as well, had given way.

Abruptly, despite the acute discomfort of exertion, he got up and approached the door. On the way, he paused before a mirror to look at his reflection.

He saw a tall, heavy, black-haired man apparently more than forty. The swarthy face, formerly quite handsome, now rather damaged by excesses, still bore that stamp of "race" which bodily debasement never really obliterates. But this countenance, in spite of its material degeneracy, was calm, strong, and even formidable. Those were the lineaments of an individual whose physical impairment was certainly not due to weakness of the will. It was a visage sardonically intelligent, unilluminated by conscience, yet filled with the self-sufficiency of one who expects and asks nothing, of this world or the next.

When he had found himself hardly in worse shape than usual, Sebastian Maure entered the adjoining room.

This apartment was a study, luxuriously furnished. Bookcases lined the walls. A variety of precious bric-a-brac was strewn about. Before a stone fireplace, on a scarlet-leather couch, a man was sleeping under a fur-lined overcoat. He was small, thin, and pale, with a bald forehead, a snub nose, and a forked

beard of brownish-red. As Sebastian Maure set foot across the door-sill, with one jerk this person sat erect, staring wildly. Then, reassured, he dropped back with a hysterical laugh. It was Andreas Romanovitch, the Russian, who exclaimed, in fluent English:

"Do you mind handing me a cigarette? The silver box on the desk is full of them. Brandy in the tantalus-case, under the Venus Anadyomene. Or if you prefer an absinthe *frappé*, ring the bell. Ring it any way. I want one myself."

"So I came home and put you out of your bed?"

"Bah! I was tired sleeping in it. Sometimes, when I come in, I am bored horribly at the thought of lying there again. The other night I slept in a taxicab running back and forth between Rome and Hadrian's Villa. I hate repetition. That's what we have to fight in life—repetition, satiety, ennui. But, alas, it gets us in the end, when we've tried everything, and tired of it."

"How old are you, Andreas?"

"Thirty-two. And you?"

"Thirty-six."

"Really? Then we both look ten years older than we are. Especially this morning."

An elderly man-servant entered, a bowl of ice in hand. Without orders, he began to mix two drinks. Andreas, enlivened by the rattle of the silver shaker, jumped up to pace the floor. Mauve silk pajamas flapped round his slight and bony frame.

"What time is it?" he inquired of the servant.

"Two, Excellency."

"*Je mehr desto besser*—the later the better! Fortunately for Russia, this is Sunday. In an Embassy, Sebastian, one doesn't work on Sunday. I tell you that because you know nothing, yourself, about the processes of honest labor. It's true that from time to time you set up to be a writer of poisonous romances. Probably you might even be a man of letters in earnest, if you were poor, and the inhabitant of an island without ladies, gambling-tables, or boats, and where the fruits were incapable of fermentation. As it is, you command too many exquisitely decorated distractions. Pardon my German, but this animal of a valet has the impudence to understand both French and English."

"And a little German, too, Excellency," vouchsafed the servant, in respectful tones, while going out.

Andreas Romanovitch drank his absinthe imperturbably, then continued:

"We must send him to the Grand for some of your clothes."

"My man is there."

"Ah, of course. Still the Greek? If I recall that face, he'll end by knifing you some day, when your wallet's extra fat. By the way, about how much did you have in it last night? You lost two thousand lire at *écarté*, and took Tito's I. O. U. for fifteen hundred. The supper was two hundred lire: I owe you half. You gave up your signet-ring to the blonde soprano from the Costanzi, the almost incom-

parable Fiammetta. If it's a relic, I'll get it back for you—she happens at the moment to be fond of me. Why, say I, when I look at myself in broad daylight, God only knows! Are you aware that you made me violently jealous at supper? You told her she was the reincarnation of Poppæa Sabina. You wanted to take her immediately to Florence, and compare her to the bust in the Uffizzi."

"How do you remember all this?"

"I sipped a mild sauterne punch. You poured down a mixture of absinthe, anisette, and brandy. I was no more than gay. But you were quite terrible, with your white, gloomy face brooding over the table, illuminated now and then by some wild thought as if by a flash of lightning. You reminded me of a daimonic Beethoven, dreaming, on the edge of the bottomless pit, of awful symphonies. Do you mind my asking if you really enjoyed yourself?"

"If I don't enjoy doing a thing, I'm not apt to do it."

"Well, every one to his little mannerisms. For my part, I always sing naughty *chansonnettes*, and want to kiss somebody. I'll match you for first chance at the tub."

"After you. And see how many minutes you can keep your head under water."

Andreas Romanovitch clacked his tongue, shed his mauve pajamas, and skipped into the bath-room.

When finally he emerged, teeth chattering, he inquired:

"May one ask how long you propose to grace our flattered circles?"

"That depends. How is Rome, this season?"

"Not bad, in our set. Every one is entertaining conscientiously. Also, the hotels are full of pretty foreigners—the moths round the flame! I make an exception. Do you know a Miss Bellamy, a compatriot of yours, if a chronic expatriate may be said to have them? A great heiress. And more. One of your uncrowned American princesses. She remains one even here, in Rome, *parbleu!* and I doubt, despite the cynics, if there's a more inexorable machinery in all Europe for testing blood. Her money, of course, would set her right at once with our cosmopolitan crowd; but she has quite as many friends in the Holy of Holies. And beautiful? Helen of Troy was certainly over-estimated. Night before last, I waltzed with this wonder, and proposed, was refused, and told her that I was going home to kill myself. But something or other put it out of my mind. And when I woke in the morning, there was your Poppæa Sabina at the telephone, to tell me that Ki-ki was in a frightful way from eating Roquefort cheese. Without mentioning names, I asked her advice: should I kill myself, or not? She said no. I'm a weak fellow where the sex is concerned. So here I stand. But when I meet Miss Bellamy again, how the deuce am I going to explain my presence?"

"What is this Miss Bellamy in Rome for?" Sebastian Maure inquired, while covering a yawn.

"To break hearts, I should say. Hearts of all nationalities. Even English. At the Grand, there's a young British soldier on furlough, a lieutenant of

cavalry, stationed in Egypt. He has ramrods sewn into the backs of all his coats, and no more expression than my Copenhagen-ware grenadier. But he's followed her here from Cairo. However, one may be fairly easy on that score. He's only the younger brother of the Earl of Lemster."

For a while Sebastian Maure said nothing. At last, clearing his throat, he uttered:

"It just happens that the Earl of Lemster's come down with an incurable disease. In London they're giving him about six months more."

*"Accidentel!"*

Aghast, the Russian assumed a camel's-hair bathrobe and an eye-glass. Sebastian raised his heavy brows.

"That turns the scale in his favor, you think?"

"No, no. We do her an injury. If you knew her——"

"In fact, I believe I met her once, somewhere or other."

"And?"

"I seem to remember what's called a saintly face, reconciled somehow to a Paris-made figure."

Andreas Romanovitch became serious, and younger-looking.

"She is good," he said, simply. "She is beautiful inside as well as out. When you see that girl, her clear gaze, her pure lips, and the light that shines through her face, all your sordidly acquired thoughts drop away like a garment of stale rags, and you're clothed again in the ideals of youth. If I might go

through life with such an angel, I could become a decent sort."

"Now you are really entertaining."

"Do you think a good woman can't reform a man?"

"So you want to be reformed?"

"By her, yes."

"Precisely. In your heart, you want to be teacher, not pupil."

"Good Heavens," cried Andreas, flushing, "has it never been revealed to you that pure virtue is incorruptible?"

"In the first place, among mortals—and I know nothing of any better species—there is no such thing as pure virtue. In the second place, no mortal virtue is incorruptible."

"What a wretch! His thoughts blight whatever they touch!"

"The truth is often fatal."

"The truth! I shall say a little prayer that some day you find it!"

"You still go to church, Andreas?"

"Certainly. And often weep before the Cross."

"Why there, particularly?"

Andreas went into the bedchamber, and threw himself on the bed.

"Go take your tub," he shouted. "Long ago I gave up reading your cursed books. Now I sha'n't even talk to you any longer."

"It's always those not sure of their faith who have to close their ears to heretics," the other remarked.

He stripped the split pajamas from his big frame, at once herculean and soft, and entered the bathroom.

When the water was as hot as he could bear, he lay down in the tub, wedged a sponge behind his neck, closed his eyes, and remained motionless, smiling.

He was used to indignation more intense than this. For countless persons who knew him only by hearsay or through his writings, no epithet was too bad to tag him with, no story about him too shocking for belief. Wherever he went—and there were few countries that he had not penetrated—he was sure to be called by some traveller “the man without a soul.”

This description amused him. He did not believe in souls.

He had never felt those mysterious enthusiasms which fix in almost every heart, some time or other, the conviction of immortality. He had never received that unaccountable influx of trust which makes God actual without need of proof. The experiences of visionaries and mystics he attributed to nervous or mental disorders. Just so he laid everything in life to some material cause.

Calmly expecting obliteration at death, he regarded with contempt the efforts of those about him to convince themselves and each other of their perpetuity.

But the world has always had its full share of agnostics. It was not Sebastian Maure's irreligion



that excited such abuse. His supreme offence lay in his formulas for conduct.

If life was a spark that soon went out forever, one owed it to himself to squeeze out of living the last drop of personal satisfaction. Saintliness for saints, if saintliness pleased them best. But for others an equal liberty to pursue the most congenial pleasures.

In Sebastian Maure's romances, the central figure, however ingeniously disguised, was always the same, wealthy, extraordinarily brilliant up to certain levels, full-blooded, ruthless, appetent, disdainful of every convention that opposed his individuality, frankly hostile to such ideals as forbearance and remorse, which Christian civilization has perfected. Not that Sebastian Maure was ignorant of the great world-movement toward altruism, human brotherhood, the betterment of life for the unborn. His disposition merely prevented him from sympathizing with such enterprises. For him they were symptoms of what he called "the modern weakness."

Had he been less a literary artist, all this propaganda might have passed unnoticed into the limbo of perverse philosophies. But his few books owned an insidious eloquence that could not be ignored. That he had sufficient talent to be fascinating was, for innumerable honest folk, his crowning outrage.

To him all this storming seemed ridiculous.

"And Andreas, too, still goes bleating along in that herd of silly sheep! . . ."

Torpid from the hot bath, he began to doze. It seemed to him that he had just been presented to

Andreas Romanovitch on a fair green lawn, before a marquee round which ladies were chatting under parasols. But the scene suggested Autumn instead of Winter, and France instead of Italy, while the voice of Andreas Romanovitch was issuing from the lips of a tall girl in white, as coldly beautiful as Artemis, who looked at him with aversion in the depths of her eyes. Or rather, it was not Andreas's voice at all, but hers, though the words were surely his—"Has it never been revealed to you that pure virtue is incorruptible? . . ."

He woke with a start. The bath-room was full of steam. The Russian's forked beard was wagging in the doorway.

"Sebastian, in my anger I lied to you. I still read them, God forgive me! Come out of your Inferno. Tito is here; and breakfast is on the table."

In the study, a short and stocky young man, resplendent in the uniform of the Genoa Cavalry, his swarthy face ornamented with a fierce little mustache, was exploring the bookcases for "something racy." It was the Sicilian, the Marchese Tito di Torredidone.

To Sebastian, by way of greeting:

"Have you been reading his Poems of Alexis Piron? I can't find them here."

"Then he has undoubtedly burned them."

"Would to Heaven I had," said Andreas Romanovitch. "As a matter of fact, I loaned them to Fiammetta."

By the window, on a table covered with Florentine lacework, two silver warming-dishes flanked a

bowl of violets. A near-by tabouret held a coffee-percolator and some wine-bottles. Andreas Romanovitch, a cigarette in one hand and a fork in the other, was beginning his meal, in Russian style, with snacks of anchovies, Swiss cheese, smoked sturgeon, spiced eels, and pickled mushrooms. From beneath his bath-robe peeped out a pair of bright-green socks. As he reached forward to spear a slice of cheese, a gold bracelet slid down his arm to clank against his wrist-watch.

"Have you no appetite, Sebastian," he mumbled. "I mean, no normal one? Will you commence with 'zakouska,' or plunge at once into the devilled kidneys? Then there's a steak *alla Pizzaiola*, ill-advised, perhaps, on account of the garlic. For who knows, in this world, what may turn up between noon and midnight?"

"I must say," commented Sebastian, sitting down, "you manage to do yourself very well in your new quarters. By the way, where are we?"

"Give yourself the trouble to look out the window and you'll see the Corso. It's expensive; but as you know, in Rome, so far as strangers go, he who economizes is lost. Besides, how the devil does one set about economizing? I take it one can't do without the necessities of life!"

Sebastian Maure, who had never economized, or done without anything he wanted, devoted himself, with a shrug, to the devilled kidneys, which he covered with cayenne pepper. But abruptly Andreas cried out:

"Ha! Ha! The bones for those who come late!"

And he jumped up to welcome a lithe, handsome man with a clear olive skin, a black beard trimmed to a point, and flashing teeth, who stood in the doorway smiling. It was the Italian novelist Ernesto Sangallo, not forty years old, but famous already throughout Europe for his three books on Church and State.

This afternoon, he was on his way to Safonoff's concert at the Augusteo. Prince Campobasso was giving a stag box-party.

At the word "Augusteo," Andreas, without further thought of breakfast, began running round frantically in search of clothes. Between shouts for his servant, he exhorted Sebastian:

"Do you know what precious things will be played this afternoon while you sit there munching? The sixth symphony of Tschaikowsky, the *Patetica*! The *Kamarinskaiä* of Glinka! Four melodies by Liadow! *La nuit de Noël*, by Rimsky-Korsakow! Incurable sensualist! Leave food alone, and dress!"

"You'd much better stay home. Music excites without satisfying."

Sebastian Maure drank his coffee and a liqueur-glass of vodka, chose from the humidor a large cigar, and seated himself in an arm-chair. Ernesto Sangallo, the smile fading from his sensitive lips, scrutinized him thoughtfully. He asked:

"Have you left cards on your friends?"

"Not yet."

"Make haste. The dinners are coming thick and fast. The Campobassi give a ball on Thursday.

Then, of course, the two regular weekly meetings in the Campagna. But the farmers, to discourage us, still make the top-bars of their five-foot fences as tight as ever. A French officer was killed last week in a run near La Pisana."

"There's no gambling so good as a game with Death," declared Andreas, jumping into his trousers.

"*Per Bacco!* You should go to war."

"I have been there. What's more, I was wounded."

"Where did this happen?"

"In a drawing-room near the Morskaiä, in Petersburg. An old general fired five shots at me. Fortunately, there wasn't much light, and he'd just returned from a highly copious banquet. He missed me, at the expense of his cloisonné and majolica. But even Napoleon knew when to retreat. I dropped out of a window."

"Then how were you wounded?"

"Oh, when I landed I broke my ankle."

After a moment, Tito chuckled.

"Andreas, as my uncle the Cardinal would say, you have no morals to speak of, but you are devilish amusing."

"I think," said Ernesto Sangallo, "he has quite as much morality as a man needs, to be sure of indulgence."

"What do I hear?" cried the object of this discussion.

"I say you are a good man."

The Russian glared at Sangallo.

"I'm no such thing! I am a very profligate, cyn-

ical, and degraded fellow, and every one knows it. I take good care that every one knows it. It's all I have to make me interesting in this gossip-nourished graveyard of a Rome! And now you come under my roof to filch my reputation! Bah! You annoy me frightfully!"

Sangallo laughed gently.

"On the contrary, I please you, though nothing could ever make you admit it. And I'll please you still further. You are not only a good man, Andreas Romanovitch, but before you die you will find some good work to do."

Sangallo, while speaking, looked at the young Russian steadily. And Andreas was suddenly sobered by that expression.

"*Mon Dieu!* Is it really a fact, what they say: that this chap is one of those who—see things?"

Sangallo hesitated, glanced round, perceived Sebastian squinting at him through the smoke. He responded, as if preoccupied with newer thoughts:

"Ah, we all see more than we realize, I think. . . ."

Sebastian's valet appeared. Twenty minutes later, the four set out, in Tito's automobile, for the Augusteo.

The motor-car crawled along the Corso. Even at this still unfashionable hour, the narrow street was blocked with cabs, while the inadequate sidewalks were hidden beneath dawdling pedestrians. Here and there, in a window of a palace, a face looked down indifferently upon the throng. At church-doors, old beggars held back the hanging

screens of leather. Over all shone that blazing sunlight which brings to Rome round mid-day, even in winter, something of tropic heat.

But suddenly all was chill and damp—the motor-car, in a mean street too narrow for the sunshine, halted before a sort of tunnel. The four, alighting, passed through into a court-yard. Here people were entering a great circular structure half hidden by the slattern walls that heeled against it. It had been the tomb of the Divine Augustus. To-day, it was the aristocratic concert-hall of Rome.

Don Livio, head of the famous Campobasso family, was already in his box. Sebastian Maure shook hands with a tall, fair man of thirty-eight, his impassive face adorned with an uptwirled brown mustache and an eye-glass that seemed part of his physiognomy. His mother had been an Englishwoman, and his wife was an American. He himself, like many Italian nobles, had a look and manner distinctly Anglo-Saxon. Nothing surprised him.

"You in town, eh? Good of you to show up. We shall want you for that affair of ours on Thursday night. . . ."

They were looking out over a spacious auditorium, decorated in pale-green and gold, the red-upholstered boxes suspended above the main floor in a sweeping semicircle. On the stage, a large orchestra was tuning to an incessant din.

Andreas, while ogling the boxes, chattered in Sebastian's ear:

"There is de Chaumont, the new French attaché,

and Mme. Berthe, his wife. They aren't too happy. You know the big, brownish fellow with them, our local saint, Don Giulio, of the Dukes of Brazzazza? By rights, he belongs among the Blacks; but unfortunately, in that society, one couldn't meet Mme. Berthe. Note the mysterious-looking lady in the interesting gown. Mme. Sémadéni, a country-woman of mine, from the Caucasus. But since she's bowing to you . . . *Bigre*, the Torquato is telling the Marchesa of Portagialla all about you: don't you observe how pleased the old girl seems, as she always does when she hears something shocking? . . . Ah, ah, ah!"

Sebastian followed his stare. He saw, in a box full of ladies, Ghirlaine Bellamy, the American.

Her blonde beauty was often said to be too nearly flawless. Its startling purity made her appear, at first glance, almost unapproachable. It called to mind certain Greek statues of the virgin goddess—a human shape informed, as it were, with a radiance unnaturally immaculate. It was of a quality to arouse instinctive reverence, rather than personal passion.

But in a case where reverence was not instinctive?

Sebastian Maure had met her once, and only for a moment. He had seen that she immediately detested him. Yet now he had come from the other end of Europe to Rome, because she was here.

And, as he gazed across the auditorium at her cold loveliness, which was like a serene defiance to all the brutality in his nature, it seemed to him that



his desire for her, after smouldering a year, was suddenly consuming him.

At his burning scrutiny, slowly she met his eyes. Though her face did not change, he knew that she remembered him. But a ripple of hand-clapping ran through the house. She looked away.

On the stage, Safonoff, appearing before his orchestra, raised his hands.

And the *Patetica* began, swelling out, through the hush, like a premonition of immeasurable travail.

## CHAPTER II

WHEN Ghirlaine Bellamy woke next morning, in her apartment at the Excelsior Hotel, her first thought was, "Something unpleasant happened yesterday." Then she remembered the Augusteo, and Sebastian Maure.

She had never felt so much antipathy to any one. Before meeting him, she had pictured him as sinister and repulsive: she had wondered how "good society" could tolerate a character so hostile to its conventions. Moreover, certain stories brought home by travellers, who claimed to have crossed his trail in far corners of the world, should have excluded him, in her opinion, even from the lax air of foreign capitals.

At their meeting, a year before, this aversion had developed into personal repugnance. Just during their brief exchange of commonplaces, she had perceived in him the birth of a rapacious covetousness, so nearly frank that before she could rid herself of him it had begun to envelop her almost like a physical approach.

That such a being as Sebastian Maure should be thus attracted to her was outrageous. For did not the attraction of one nature to another presuppose some sort of mutual sympathy?

Still smarting under this insult yesterday renewed, she could not bring herself to dismiss him with serenity.

An orphan, and her own mistress, since her eighteenth year, she was usually self-reliant and courageous. But to-day a vague uneasiness was trying to possess her. Of late, she had been thinking a great deal about one man who wanted to marry her. So now, all at once, the remembrance of his clean strength and sanity was reassuring.

And, as she was going to ride with him this morning in the Borghese Gardens, she made haste to call her maid, make her toilette, and don her habit.

She left her bedchamber, passed through a pale-blue salon, knocked on the opposite door.

"Aunt Charlotte?"

"Come in, my dear."

She found her aunt at what is called, in European hostelries, "an American breakfast."

Mrs. Alexander Bellamy was small and elderly, with fresh cheeks, white water-curls, and an air of high self-respect. A widow, accustomed to the somnolent respectability of "old New York," she had become, through a cruel trick of Fate, her niece's habitual chaperon in the great world of Europe.

Now, pointing to a well-filled breakfast tray before her, she announced:

"My child, since you ask me how I am, I'm dying of indigestion. I know anger causes it. Nevertheless, I'm dying of it. Some anger is virtuous. Mine always is. Please examine these chops."

"They look like cutlets."

"They are cutlets. But they pretend to be chops, just as everything in this land pretends to be what it is not. Chops were my order. English ones, very thick, broiled rare, over a hickory fire. I even repeated it in Italian—'*Choppi Inglesi, molto grande, rara, broilata sopra una conflagrazione di hickory.*' But I forget: you don't know Italian, my dear."

"It's such a temptation not to learn it, when every one understands English or French."

"This waiter, apparently, doesn't even understand his own language. Do you see what he's done? He—or rather his accomplice—has taken some very good chops, and boned them, and split them, and fried them in oil, and bathed them in orange-colored sauce! And they call this the centre of Christendom!"

"Poor aunty! How you hate going about!"

"We've been over all that. If you're happy, I can put up with the rest. Besides, my life was always too easy. I knew that Providence must have something different in store for me. Sooner or later, every one gets his cross to bear."

"Your neuralgia's no better?"

"It is abating. By the time that ball of Betty Fry's comes round—or I suppose I must call her Princess Campobasso these days—I shall probably not have so much as a twinge. I'll be forced to sit up all night, with my feet on a marble floor, and talk to that wicked old Marchesa of Portagialla. In our circle at home, she wouldn't be tolerated an instant.

Nor would most of the rest, I fear! Whom are you riding with now?"

"Vincent. Lieutenant Pamfort."

"At least, he's an Englishman. Tell him I can't find that remedy for bronchial cough."

"But Lieutenant Pamfort hasn't a cough!"

"His horse has. Don't leave the doors open, my dear. Your room is always as cold as a barn."

Ghirlaine Bellamy went downstairs and out to the portico, where a groom was holding her mount, and another for himself.

She rode up the sunny Via Veneto, through an ancient city gate, and into the Borghese Gardens.

Before her, the wooded landscape, sombrously green, stretched afar in long undulations. Here and there, in the distance, statues shone forth against the verdure. To the left, the ground fell away, to form a circular meadow rimmed by a bridle-path. On the edge of this course she drew rein, beneath some stone-pine trees that spread their foliage, high in the air, against the bright sky. The bridle-path was empty.

At a walk, she began to round the circle, listening to the birds. But a thud of hoofs swelled out behind her: the groom pulled aside to let pass two galloping cavaliers. They were Marchese Tito and Ernesto Sangallo. She concealed her disappointment with a smile.

"What energetic men!"

Tito, his wits quickened by the adjacency of beauty, replied:

"When one is virtuous enough to get up early, there's often some reward."

Sangallo, for his part, watched her with frank enjoyment. Then, riding up on the other side, he remarked:

"The morning's your time indeed, when everything is immaculate."

He was one man who never paid actual court to her, yet always gave her an impression of profound sympathy. But she could not resist replying:

"Do you know you have a reputation for seeing things better than they are?"

"A man can never hope to see anything as good as it really is. As for you, you only reveal more clearly than usual what all women have—that mysterious inner flame, fed at an altar to which we others don't know the way. In the least of you, you know, it's never extinguished, it never even flickers. Though it's often hidden altogether from us coarser beings, because of the infirmities of our thoughts."

His words amazed her. From an American they might not have seemed remarkable. But she had never imagined an Italian with such ideas.

"What the deuce is he talking about?" cried Tito, edging closer. "He's worse than Andreas Romanovitch. And sometimes you might as well not understand French, Italian, or English when that fellow's speaking it."

"He is showing me his high opinion of women," said Ghirlaine.

"Oh!"

"And what," she asked Tito, "are your views on that subject, Marchese?"

"I think a beautiful woman is the noblest work of God," the soldier responded, promptly. "The foreigners come here in swarms to look at paintings and statuary. Ridiculous! The Corso, at six o'clock any evening, offers a much more æsthetic show. Besides, ladies of paint and marble are irritating. Sebastian Maure said something about music yesterday that fits the case. What was it? 'Music—' Never mind: it was excellent anyway."

"You have heard of Sebastian Maure?" Sangallo asked her.

"I detest him!"

The novelist looked surprised.

"It is not good to detest things. Especially, when they're pitiable. As for that man, his soul is dead. And all that his marvellous literary dexterity might be the instrument of, if only that dead soul of his were resurrected! Do you know that the printed word of some natures has an inexplicable, dynamic power that's appalling? No published phrase, of certain individuals, but leaves its mark on mankind, for good or evil."

"I think mankind's rather too far advanced to be injured by such ideas as his."

"It isn't the strong alone who read, but the weak also. Weakness is always susceptible to disease. How few there still are who don't need all the spiritual tonic that genius can distil for them, from the eternal truths! But the corruption of that man's dead soul is always poisoning the weak and frail."

"Capers!" ejaculated Tito, looking almost startled.

Sangallo pointed across the meadow. Two riders, a man and a woman, had just appeared.

"There's little Mme. de Chaumont, the wife of the new French attaché. At seventeen her family married her to a stranger. He was a fashionable young Parisian, steeped in that peculiarly immoral local literature which is quite heartless while pretending to be all heart. His was one of the malleable natures. Example, more than anything else, has made him what he is. For ten years his wife has endured his viciousness. Since the Church won't divorce them, she goes on enduring it. But that's nothing new. It's only something too old, that we're going to sweep out, some day, with a lot of other rubbish."

"Who is riding with her?"

"Don Giulio Brazzazza."

"The man with the paralyzed sister? A sort of recluse, is he not?"

"*Un orso*—a bear," vouchsafed Tito, using the slang phrase for unsocial men. "And a 'Black' one. He gives tremendous sums to the Vatican, when he might be living like old what's-his-name—Lucullus."

"A natural saintly type," Sangallo observed. "The direct contrast to de Chaumont. The sort to revive the idealism of a convent school-girl. Guess what has happened!"

"If he were half a man," Tito growled, "instead of nine-tenths a monk, he'd run away with her."

"And she?" Ghirlaine turned to Sangallo. He answered:



"A woman in love stands ready to give or withhold, to be infinitely weak or strong, obedient—as man seldom is—to the command of destiny, when it comes to her through the desire of her one true mate."

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" said Tito, beaming, "but this is conversation!"

They were walking their horses on the far side of the circle. Across the meadow rose the brown walls of ancient Rome, and the crumbling turrets of the Pinciana Gate. There, at last, beneath the stone-pines, a slim rider appeared. Sangallo announced:

"We must be pushing on. Tito wants to try this nag at the Parioli jumps before the next fox-hunting."

"The future is full of time," Tito grumbled.

"For you, perhaps, Sicilian, but not for me. Forward! Trot! Gallop!"

And they set off round the circle, waving good-bys, and scattering dirt-clods high in the air behind them.

But Ghirlaine, holding her horse to a walk, awaited the new-comer.

He approached, comely, alert, perhaps thirty years old, already distinguished-looking, his small yellow mustache almost white against his tan. His face showed the self-repression of a long line of English gentlemen. But his eyes appeared anxious.

"I'm not late?"

"No; I was early."

"Those fellows were away like a shot."

"Sangallo's a dear."

"Oh, I see." He flushed with pleasure. Then,

as they proceeded side by side, he jerked out the words:

"Anything new?"

"Almost. . . ."

He drew a deep breath. She went on:

"Won't you give me a day or two longer? It's such an important thing!"

"That first night, in Egypt, I knew it was the most important thing I should ever have in my life. I don't blame you for hesitating, though. Somehow, I feel that I'm almost cheating you. It's curious: an English girl wouldn't make me feel, as you do, that I've so little to offer. . . . Even now, when things are opening out before me, at home . . . By the way, I got a despatch in the night that my brother's very bad. I may have to go on any day."

She made a gesture of distress.

"It does seem heartless," Pamfort admitted, gloomily. "But we'd get no credit for feeling that way from him. He's always disliked me, and thought I hated him because he had the title and the estate. For that matter, he's quarrelled with all of us, even the women. Maude told me last evening she might not go up to the funeral."

He referred to his sister, Lady Glastenwold, who was staying in Rome.

"Do you know," said Ghirlaine, "that strangers will say I was influenced because you were going to be Earl of Lemster?"

"No more than that I was influenced because you had a fortune."

"Did you ever think of that?" she asked, in low tones.

He met her gaze without flinching.

"Inevitably. I've always been glad of it. It's helped to make you—how shall I say it—the most perfectly finished thing in the world."

"And the strangers would be right, in a way, about the title and the estate. For that will make something sure—" She felt herself blushing. "That will make sure a dream of mine, that you must believe isn't sordid, but that I can't tell you now. . . ."

They rode on in silence. She contemplated the picture of the future that those thoughts called up.

She saw a great house in a fair, congenial country, where the ideals of a healthy race, continually revived in that northern air, maintained the example of an illustrious history. There, where the future seemed inviolable like the past, she might fulfil splendidly her proper destiny as a mother of sons. What finer gifts, for those little beings that lived only in imagination, yet were already loved instinctively?

For it was characteristic of her rather exceptional temperament that, with the unfolding of instinct, her reveries had preferred to reach out beyond the thought of love to the thought of maternity.

Her life with him would be made smooth by mutual respect and delicate reticence. She fancied long years in beautiful surroundings, amid loving children, with only peaceful happiness in retrospection. She was twenty-five. Nowhere else had she found

such promises. Why did she still hesitate—as if not quite sure but that fate might have in store for her experiences more vital than these?

She was on the point of making her decision. But he said:

“There’s something I should have told you sooner, perhaps. I don’t want the slightest suspicion of dishonesty between us. . . . There used to be a girl at home. Not very well off. Good county people, you know. We grew up together. Folks rather took it for granted that we’d marry some day. . . . But I went to Egypt. And you appeared. . . . So I found I’d been mistaken. . . .”

The sunshine seemed to her less bright. Never had she been conscious of inflicting pain without perceiving in the world about her a subtle, melancholy alteration. Was she injuring some one now, whose sorrow, reaching across sea and land, cast a film of sadness over her surroundings? Beneath the stone-pines she drew rein.

“Thank you, Vincent, for telling me that.”

“Not going! At least, I’ll see you home.”

“I find I want to be by myself to-day.”

“She hasn’t made a difference!”

“Not unless we could be hurting her.”

“Oh, nothing could very well hurt her! She’s always been as strong and bluff as a man. A big, sunburnt boy, with a pack of terriers falling over her feet, and a stick in her hand, to kill vermin in the coverts. . . .”

“Ah! . . .”

Ghirlaine returned to the hotel. And all day she strove to escape that thought. . . .

"But she is a stranger! Surely I owe her nothing!"

Yet a voice seemed to murmur in her ear: "Who can say what debts we owe, to the remotest human beings?"

"Is it possible that I'm heartless?"

"Still, if I stop to consider another, do I really love him enough?"

Before this idea she recoiled. For it seemed to her terrible that a woman should deliver herself over to a man not loved completely.

"But what is love!"

She had had her share of immature devotions, of girlish infatuations, of longings of that peculiar, immaterial sort that are rarely found outside Anglo-Saxon countries, and that have their centre, perhaps, in America. A girl of Latin race, made aware of Ghirlaine's past sentimental experiences, would not have considered them experiences at all. But girls of Latin race are generally accustomed, from immaturity, to an introspection that Ghirlaine, at least, had always instinctively avoided.

But to-day it was not to be avoided. . . .

"The *Scirocco* is blowing. Perhaps that's what makes me so strange. . . ."

In her motor-car she was borne at random through the streets. With vacant eyes, she gazed on the dismal grandeur of old palace walls, on the dripping nudity of fountains, on blotched church-fronts, on

the ancient marble wreckage, rising here and there, amid modern structures, like solemn messages of the ineffaceable effect of beauty. In busier thoroughfares, she alighted at shop-doors. But all the trivial and complicated luxuries that she purchased left her listless. Toward five o'clock, it occurred to her that Lady Glastenwold would be at the Excelsior for tea. Might not his sister set her mind at rest? She drove homeward.

Before the hotel, limousines and carriages were drawing up. Within, on the enormous pink rug of the "marble room," the arrivals were shaking hands and chattering. From the winter garden strains of music floated out above glass screens, through which were visible tall palms, green marble pillars, glistening tea-tables. In this room Ghirlaine found, at one table, Princess Campobasso with her eight-year-old daughter Donna Isotta, the Marchesa della Portagialla, Donna Letizia Torquato, and Lady Glastenwold.

Princess Campobasso was a handsome American with majestic figure, red hair, and vivid coloring. Though her marriage to Prince Livio had given her the *entrée* into that innermost social circle of the capital, sometimes called "The New Exclusion League," she preferred the cosmopolitan diplomatic set, because of its superior vivacity. Through eagerness not to appear unsophisticated in European society, she had acquired a somewhat hard brilliancy of manner. She had, indeed, done everything to be *chic*, except to contract a *liaison*. For this all

Rome was waiting, content that it would know the fact almost before she did herself.

Drawing Ghirlaine into a chair beside her, she laughed:

"You're just in time to be shocked. The Marchesa is giving proofs why men used to be more fascinating."

In her youth, Marchesa della Portagialla had been a beauty. To-day, one saw a small, obese old woman who walked on two canes, and whose fat face, covered with purplish powder, was graced by a grizzled mustache. Enlarging her black eyes at Ghirlaine, she nodded solemnly.

"*Oui, ma petite,*" she asserted, in an asthmatic voice as deep as a man's. "When I was young, they were terrible—but quite terrible—and consequently far nicer. La, la! My children, one lived, in the Rome of those days!"

"Perhaps," ventured Princess Campobasso, mischievously, "it's some tiresome change or other in public opinion that's altered them, poor dears!"

"Public opinion! Bah! There has always been public opinion. But men who were worth the name never lost much time in shutting the door on it—and hanging their hats on the key-hole."

None but Ghirlaine seemed to pay any attention to little Donna Isotta. The latter, though engrossed apparently with a *café parfait*, listened gravely to everything. Like most children raised in Italian households, she had overheard already, in her short life, some very strange conversations. And the Mar-

chesa of Portagialla would certainly never have thought of editing her remarks on Ghirlaine's account. Besides, in her opinion, these American girls, who habitually went off alone, Heaven only knew where, were not to be classed as *jeunes filles* at all.

"Isotta," said Ghirlaine, "I didn't see you out in your basket-cart this morning."

"I lay abed. The *Scirocco* gave me a headache."

"That's a pity. The Gardens were beautiful—at first. . . ."

"I like the Pincio in the evening better, when everybody's driving. One sees more."

"More people, but not so many flowers."

"People are more interesting. We don't grow up to be flowers." She sipped her *parfait* serenely. "I like to watch people," she declared, in her clear, infantile voice.

"Poor baby," thought Ghirlaine, "has she had no childhood at all?" Thank God, her children would not be like this one! Nor like the child of another here! And she looked at Donna Letizia Torquato, a sweet-faced woman of forty, whose brown skin nearly matched her eyes and crinkling hair. A widow now, she had married into the venerable and crumbling Torquato family, to give birth to a degenerate son. This afternoon, as the Queen had been receiving, she wore on her breast, under her furs, a large monogram of diamonds, her badge as Lady-of-the-Palace. Meeting Ghirlaine's gaze, she smiled sympathetically. But the old Marchesa babbled on:



"Imagine! It was three in the morning! The house was roused! Don Sigismondo was hammering on the door with the butts of his duelling-pistols! Thrilling?"

"*Altro*—more than thrilling!" exclaimed Princess Campobasso, with a delicious shudder.

"Footling, I call it," said Lady Glastenwold. "A woman who doesn't play a man square isn't worth raising the roof for." Her flat cheeks were bright, and her lips closed firmly over her rather projecting teeth. With her ash-blond hair simply dressed, and her tailor-made suit, she presented a picture of thoroughly British disapproval.

"You know," she added, her voice full of the uncompromising severity that still remains among the old county aristocracy in England, "the best people everywhere owe it to their position never to make themselves ridiculous."

"Dear Lady Maude," replied the Marchesa, sweetly, "all love-affairs can't be conducted in the midst of the North Sea."

"No, I suppose you're right," Lady Glastenwold assented, with generous condescension. "Well, I'm off! I promised to drop in on young Brian Dungan-nan. He's showing his latest statue."

"I haven't had a word with you yet," Ghirlaine protested.

"Nor I with you. Drink your tea, and I'll take you along."

"Ah, you tireless Anglo-Saxons!" drawled a new voice.

A lissome, black-haired woman, with almond-shaped eyes, attired in a rather spectacular gown and hat, had wandered over, cigarette in hand, from a neighboring table. She was Mme. Sémadéni, the Slav from the Caucasus, of whom no one knew anything in particular except that she had the approval of the Russian Ambassador, was extremely well off, and gave perfect dinners. Standing in a limp, graceful attitude by Ghirlaine's chair, she stared down at the girl with an inscrutable smile.

"How I envy you! At the close of an enervating day you still look so supremely vital!"

"Do I? I feel rather done."

Mme. Sémadéni regarded her thoughtfully.

"Perhaps there is something different about you. Not weariness, though. Something else."

She sat down beside Ghirlaine with a single, sinuous movement.

"Do you know," she said, in low tones, with a subtle smile, "to-day you have the appearance of being under a shadow? This afternoon I should like to read your hand."

"You believe in palmistry?" asked Ghirlaine, smiling in turn.

The Russian glanced at the others. They were asking Donna Letizia about the Queen's reception.

"For me," Mme. Sémadéni replied, "it's not so much the lines of the palm as the impression I get, when I hold the passive hands of certain persons, at certain times. For now and then portents cluster round us that we ourselves don't fathom, but that

some one else, used to receiving strange impressions, may see for an instant. Perhaps I talk foolishness?"

"You interest me. So you think that events descend upon us, instead of waiting for us to shape them?"

"They descend upon us, of course. The past and the future are full of forces that order our every gesture, direct our every step. Out of what has been, and what is yet to be, they are always approaching us, like great, slow-moving winged angels, each with his secret influence to work. And the wind of their wings sweeps us forward, backward. . . ."

"If that were so, we should have no power over ourselves, no choice between good and evil."

"Who can say what is good and what is evil? They are inseparable. They are the same thing. And either must be a happy choice, because both bring blessings. . . . Well, will you let me take your hand?"

Ghirlaine hesitated. This curious woman had roused all her superstition. Was it possible that her day-long agitation could be translated thus?

Above the music she heard, as if far off, the Marchesa wheezing:

"Even when Florence was the capital, they did things much better——"

She held out her hand, and Mme. Sémadéni took it.

For a while, the Russian said nothing. Then, abruptly, her eyes dilated.

"This is strange. There seems to be some sort of bond between you and me. . . ."

She was silent again. At last, she slowly pronounced:

"You are in danger."

"Danger! Of what?"

"I cannot feel that. . . . Things are on the verge. . . . It is like an avalanche, trembling before it falls."

"Will it fall?"

"Yes."

She dropped Ghirlaine's hand. The music had stopped. People round them were rising.

"Now I am sorry! It's sometimes bad to strike a light in the dark."

"I'm sure," replied Ghirlaine, trying to smile, "that it's all your imagination."

"Ah, no doubt! No doubt!"

Ghirlaine rose to her feet.

"Ready?" asked Lady Glastenwold, briskly.

"Do you care if I change my mind? I'm rather too fagged, after all."

"You do look pale. Run upstairs and lie down before dinner."

"The foreigners," remarked the Marchesa, severely, "make a great mistake not to take the *siesta* in Rome. They get so they can't digest, end up with a bilious chill, and call it Roman fever. So the city obtains a bad name."

Ghirlaine, leaving, heard Mme. Sémadéni drawl in reply:

"How easy it is for a city, even, to get a bad name. . . ."

She ascended to her apartment.

It was empty. Darkness had fallen. The atmosphere in the *salon* stifled her. She raised a window. But the air of the street was no less oppressive. From afar came a rumble of thunder.

The vague uneasiness of the morning returned to her. In the face of forebodings that she could not understand, yet that seemed to her, just now, as real as the gathering storm, she felt like calling for help.

She turned on the lights, sat down at a writing-desk, and scribbled the words:

*Yes. Ghirlaine.*

Below she added:

*Come quickly.*

The envelope she addressed to:

*Lieutenant the Honorable Vincent Pamfort, Grand Hotel.*

Her maid entered, and took away the note.

"It's done. . . ."

She returned to the open window. Thunder was crashing over the hills. Rain was falling in torrents. Already the air seemed clearer, and she less frightened.

### CHAPTER III

THE Palazzo Campobasso stood in a narrow street now devoted chiefly to the shops and dwellings of the humble. Amid the squalor of that neighborhood it seemed like a venerable aristocrat, who remains majestic in whatever environment Time places him.

On Thursday night, toward eleven o'clock, the palace was ablaze with lights. Before it, the way resounded with a clatter of horses' hoofs and motor-engines. And from the dilapidated windows round about, the poor, craning their necks and pointing, watched the arrival of great ladies, diplomatists, and princes.

All equipages turned into the deep gateway, smoky from torches stuck in iron sockets. The old porter, his obsolete-looking cape-coat festooned with gold lace, was continually raising his big hat like that of a field-marshal of Napoleon, and bowing till his little sword stuck up behind him.

At the rear of the pillared court-yard, the guests alighted before a fine stone staircase. They ascended between rows of servants clad in the gala livery of the Campobassi—green coats of shaggy plush, peach-colored knee-breeches, and white silk stockings. At the first landing the major-domo of the palace was pointing to the cloak-rooms on either side.

Then emerged the dress-uniforms gay with epaulets and belts of gold and silver, the ball-gowns of ladies whose throats and arms displayed the jewels of great houses. And every one continued the ascent toward the "noble" floor.

A vista of immense rooms appeared. Clusters of wax candles shone in mid-air among the pendants of elaborate chandeliers, or were reflected on all sides in old mirrors that extended to the cornices. The walls, lined with gilt chairs and sofas, disappeared behind tapestries and paintings famous throughout Europe. The ceilings either displayed great frescoes, in which gods and goddesses sprawled at random amid clouds, or else interlacing rafters, rich with the heraldic carving of an earlier age. In corners, statues of pagan deities looked down, their smooth shapes mellow from antiquity. A golden mist, intense round the chandeliers and sconces, gave to the long perspective a vague splendor.

Prince and Princess Campobasso were receiving in the first apartment. The guests, after being greeted by them, continued through the rooms. These were so arranged that one could come round to the starting-point without turning back, thus making the *giro*, or tour, so desirable in the opinion of Italian hostesses. Nine halls, each large enough for an ordinary reception, had been thrown into one. In the most extensive, a string-band, from Safonoff's orchestra, was ready to furnish music for the dancers.

An immense number of people had been invited.

It was one of those monster balls, of which nowadays two or three occur every year in Rome, that apparently break down, at least for the evening, the barriers between the several societies of the capital. The diplomatic world was there in force. The New Exclusion League came in contact with the cosmopolitan element. Even some members of that other close corporation, the Royal Court, rubbed elbows with the supporters of the Vatican. A dozen years before, such a conglomeration would have been impossible.

Among the last arrivals whom the Campobassi welcomed, before withdrawing to the ballroom, was Sebastian Maure.

"I began to think you weren't coming," said Princess Betty, as if she had been watching for him all evening. She wore a dress of hyacinth-blue velvet embroidered in silver, and a wonderful *parure* of the Campobasso diamonds. She was slightly pale, like one at the apogee of life. It was, indeed, one of the supreme moments for the woman who had been little Betty Fry of Madison Avenue.

"Nothing," replied Sebastian, "could have kept me from this moment, dear lady."

And with that charm of manner which had not deserted him, he turned to congratulate Don Livio on the success of his first season as Master of the Roman Hunt.

"I understand you've made the finest pack outside of England, and the least destructive field in years."



"You must come out next week and judge for yourself."

"Perhaps I may, if I find a hunter to lift me over these Roman fences."

He passed into the second room.

This apartment was full of men, who left a narrow path for the new-comers. Amid the civilians' coats, many uniforms were scattered. Near the door, a group of middle-aged Italians, all in black, were talking apart, with vehement gesticulations:

"It was time to suspend somebody! For a week the Socialists have prevented all legislation with their howls. . . . Apparently, they'd only just discovered that the Camorra was used in Naples to secure his return. . . . And pray what are they themselves interested in, nowadays, but individual intrigues? . . . All the same, my dear friend, the Camorra! That tremendous parasite, which has its roots in the scum of our southern population, while its tentacles climb up to twine about the very footstool of authority . . ."

Sebastian Maure escaped the rest of this typically Italian peroration. He approached a crowd of young men at the far end of the room—the present-day descendants of the "hereditary ruling class."

"Altogether too thin. . . . Time will remedy that. . . . No time like the present. . . . You should return to La Sorrentina: she weighs at least a hundred kilos in her stage costume, which is equivalent to nothing. . . . This little one is rather *simpatica*, though. What sort of dowry will

she have? Did you see her brother's waistcoat? They're making them so in Paris now. . . . And I hear we're all to have velvet cuffs on our dress-coats. . . . *Perdinci!* My tailor has told me nothing about that! . . ."

In the third room Sebastian Maure found Andreas Romanovitch, Marchese Tito, and Ernesto Sangallo.

"Thank Heaven," cried Andreas Romanovitch, his little red eyes sparkling, "here is some one who can settle the question for us!"

"What question?"

"Whether we're to have better luck in a future life with the ladies who refuse us a kiss in this one."

"Best to enjoy to-day what may have no existence to-morrow."

"But when you're refused point-blank?"

"When you're refused something, why not take it anyway?"

"A predatory animal, this Sebastian! Do stand to one side, anyhow! With that elephantine shape of yours in the way, a hundred people may have slipped past without my seeing them."

"No one has gone in lately," volunteered Tito, "but Mme. de Chaumont."

"Then Don Giulio is probably out of his cave to-night."

"This sentimental Slav is always putting two and two together!"

"One and one, you mean."

"Take care," Sangallo warned him. "Here comes her husband."

Hector de Chaumont joined them, a tall young man of womanish figure, his chin concealed by a fluffy, mouse-colored beard spread out like a fan. His hand-clasp was lifeless.

"Tito, the girl we saw looking out of the studio window on Mons Tarpeo is Brian Dungannan's model. A peasant from Ariccia. Name, Camilla. When she goes out walking, blind, deaf, and dumb. And how, my dear Andreas, is the adorable Fiammetta?"

"My dear Hector, her name isn't Fiammetta any more. It is Poppæa Sabina. And she does nothing, lately, but ask me questions about this scoundrelly Sebastian."

"Ha, ha! The eternal triangle, dear colleague!"

"No doubt, dear colleague. Though in her case you might better say, the eternal polygon. To change a painful subject, where shall I find Mme. de Chaumont?"

"In the ballroom, I think, with little Donna Dora."

"Ah, that poor child," exclaimed Andreas, wincing. "Always in the ballroom, though she can never hope to dance! Always watching while others whirl past, on their strong limbs, in the arms of young men!"

"Every ill conceals its purpose," said Sangallo, quietly.

He turned to greet considerably a puerile-looking youth of twenty, with pallid skin, an unsymmetrical face, and a mustache of half a dozen hairs twirled up at the corners of his lips. It was Don Leone,

Donna Letizia's son, and the last of the ancient line of the Torquati.

To Sebastian, the new-comer announced, in a thin, frilling voice:

"Grandpapa has heard you're in Rome. He told me to ask you to call."

He referred to old Prince Torquato, an eccentric who lived continually shut up in his palace—a dweller in the past, a foe of progress, a woman-hater.

"Very kind of him. I shall certainly do so."

"Are you dancing to-night, Leone?"

"Dancing is so fatiguing. No: I've been watching Miss Bellamy."

"*Nom d'un nom d'un nom d'un nom!*" Andreas ejaculated. "Then she did slip past, after all!"

He and Tito made off incontinently. Sebastian Maure sauntered into the fourth room.

Here were more uniforms, clustered round ball-dresses. But in a corner a group in sober garb were talking apart. They were "Blacks," or members of the Vatican party. Sebastian, as he passed them, heard a big, bony man, with the honest, swarthy ugliness of a Savonarola, pronounce:

"The number of unbeneficed clergy has risen almost to seventy thousand, to say nothing of the mass-priests. If they're to live, the Ecclesiastical Fund must allow larger doles. In short, the minimum must be raised. . . ."

This was Don Giulio, of the Dukes of Brazzazza. While he was speaking, his large, melancholy eyes

looked over the heads of his auditors, toward the doorway of the fifth room, through which drifted the music of a waltz.

Sebastian, smiling to himself, entered the fifth apartment.

It adjoined the ballroom, and was full of ladies. Donna Letizia was there, her hair, skin, and eyes nearly matched by her costume of pale-brown satin. He saw Lady Glastenwold, remarkable amid all those lily-like women for her fresh country color. But a low voice reached his ear:

*"Tiens, mon ami. . . ."*

He turned to meet the inscrutable eyes of the Russian, Mme. Sémadéni.

Her lithesome figure was wrapped in emerald-green; cascades of emeralds were spread on her bosom. An exotic perfume enveloped her; and Sebastian, as it reached him, remembered vividly other lands and years. He kissed her hand.

"I was looking for you, gracious lady ever beautiful."

"My dear friend, since you came to Rome you have not looked for me once."

"As Petronius says, there's a peculiar charm in postponing the finest pleasures."

"If you think that, then your inner, as well as your outer, self is greatly changed. No: it is just because we've played our parts together in this act, and are destined, now, to some other scenes apart. But often it isn't quite easy to obey the Prompter. . . ."

"Even when the appearance of one's old co-actor is so changed?"

"Is it the envelope of the flesh that attracts? You know it's something deeper. Do you remember my ever telling you that you were the sort of man who could always have what he wanted of us others? . . . But of course you're changed! People don't go on destroying themselves without its becoming noticeable."

"My dear Lydia, I lead the life that's most congenial to me."

"And when you've killed yourself?"

"Why, I shall have lived."

Looking at him intently, she replied:

"You are not happy, Sebastian."

"That's easily remedied?"

Still staring at him, she shook her head.

"Good-night, my poor friend."

She turned away.

He approached two diplomatists. One was saying:

"I needn't ask you what the effect would be, if Austro-Hungarian Bonds were listed on the Bourse. The Vienna market eased for the benefit of Imperial German loans. In the end, French financial resources available for German armament. *Belle affaire!* In effect, if the French Senate hadn't waked up——"

The other diplomatist, an old gentleman with a rosy, innocent face and dreamy eyes, took Sebastian by the arm. As if vaguely perplexed, he inquired:

"Would you say her head was too small for her height? I've seen a superb carved gem, from Pompeii, with her proportions. But they're rare. They approach the unrealizable ideal——"

"What are you talking about!" the first diplomatist asked, in amazement.

"That girl yonder. Miss what's her name? Miss Bellamy."

He saw her. She was in white, a strand of pearls round her neck, a wreath of white roses in her hair. The exceeding slenderness of her shape seemed somehow belied by a certain delicate fulness of her throat. Indeed, that lovely throat, milk-white, ringed round by the twofold crease called "Venus's collar," appeared to be hinting to him: "It would surprise you to know how much of all this physical reticence is due to fashion. . . ." Her eyes met his.

She had expected to see him here. Still, she found herself ill prepared for this new encounter of glances. This was due, perhaps, to the fact that Vincent had not yet arrived.

Ghirlaine turned to Lady Glastenwold, who, as Mrs. Bellamy was again out of sorts, accompanied her.

"Do you fancy he's had worse news from England? He said eleven. And now it's midnight."

Lady Maude squeezed her hand.

"An eternity, when one's in love—eh, dear old thing?"

"Hush!"

The engagement was not to be announced for a while.

An Ambassador, fresh from a dinner at the Quirinal, wearing the Cordon of Saints Michael and Lazarus, addressed Miss Bellamy:

"Not bostonning to-night, *Gnädige Fräulein*? Not even the *quadrille fleuri*? Just as well, perhaps. To throw but one rose would be to sow a crimson field of duels. What do I get if I propose you for the Nobel Peace Prize? Ah—when you smile like that, you pay in advance! . . ."

He moved on, scattering compliments, like an old, bald-headed, highly ornamental bird pecking his way through a flower-garden.

Many young girls were thereabouts, very prim though richly dressed, with downcast eyes, and lips half afraid to smile at the banal speeches of youths surrounding them. The married ladies, however, seemed like a different race. Exuberant, full of intense vitality and temperament, they gave the effect of personalities almost too vivid for modern clothes. Their exquisite Paris dresses were subtly incongruous. One regretted that the *peplum* and the sandals could not be revived for them.

But they chattered in English—a language more used, in some Roman homes, than Italian:

"Oh, my dear, merely summer-resort acquaintances! In town, we don't even bow. . . . And what sort of place is that for August? . . . A place where a woman can buy a hat, that's all. . . . Still, they say that two years ago she . . . By the way, he's here to-night. Have you read his latest book?



Frightful, certainly, but fascinating. . . . And that's the worst of it. The old Sheikh of the Assassins only took people's lives. This man means to murder hope and conscience. . . . And not merely a theorist! Do you know what happened when he was in the Caucasus?"

"Will you take me into the ballroom?" asked Ghirlaine of Andreas Romanovitch, who had just popped up before her.

"Would I escort the *peri Banou* into Paradise?"

He offered his arm, and they passed through a doorway framed with gilded cupids.

The ballroom, its walls lined with mirrors overlaid by golden arabesques, its high bays adorned with frescoes, was sweet from countless roses. The music had stopped: on the great marble floor a swarm of couples returned to the chairs. In one corner Ghirlaine saw the old Marchesa of Portagiolla, Mme. de Chaumont, and, beside the latter, a young girl motionless on a sofa heaped up with cushions. It was Don Giulio's sister, Donna Dora.

The invalid, small, rather plump, with a dainty aquiline nose and indecisive lips, had the clear pallor of a camelia. Since in all her seventeen years she had never walked, her life had been largely spent with nurses, old folks, and nuns. It was said that she had "a vocation" for the religious life: but her disability prevented her from taking the veil. To-day, her heart remained cloistered in childish piety, gentle, resigned. Yet from time to time there stole into her big black eyes a vague wistfulness.

But a radiant smile appeared on her face, when she saw Andreas Romanovitch.

"I've brought a beautiful lady to talk to you," he told her, gayly.

"But you," she asked him, in a clear young voice, while holding Ghirlaine's hand, "are going to stay too, and tell me funny things?"

"We're all going to stay till you're tired of us. Here is even Tito, ready to give his imitation of the Colonel and the stupid sentry. We'll keep him till last, though, or you'll be tired at once. But it seemed to me, as we crossed the floor, that we were going to interrupt something interesting. I'll wager the Maréchal Brunner rose-bush is in bloom at last!"

"Oh, no. Mme. de Chaumont was only letting me talk about Giulio."

"You adore that brother of yours!"

"He is so good!"

"That," the Marchesa rumbled, benevolently, "is the very best of reasons, my dear."

A frail, elderly man, with a long white beard and profound eyes, smiled at these words as he passed.

"Who was that?" Andreas inquired.

"Eh," chuckled the Marchesa, "an amusing old character! A hermit, a butterfly farmer, a flower-doctor, a mad star-gazer—I don't know what! His name is John Elzevir. He's American-born. He lives out Tivoli way. In my youth, I was actually in love with the man for a week, because he looked like a saint. And saints were a novelty, in the Rome of those days."

"There are lots of them now."

"I see one who is not," the Marchesa retorted, squinting across the hall.

Again, Ghirlaine's eyes met the gaze of Sebastian Maure, intelligent, penetrating, frightfully comprehensive—the gaze of a man who sees and appreciates everything in a flash. . . .

She spread her fan, and let it flutter before her bosom.

"How is it that a foreigner of his sort is received here?"

"Because he's exceedingly rich, and belongs to a family that goes back, in its French branch, to the last Crusade. It was a cadet of that house who emigrated to America in the seventeenth century, and founded the fortune. But surely the Maures are well known in New York?"

"Not at all. Because this one is the last of them, and has spent nearly all his life in Europe."

"True," remarked the Marchesa. "He's not a bit like an American."

"Thank you for that," said Ghirlaine.

"After all," protested Andreas Romanovitch, "who knows? In my opinion, all that we see is a pose."

"Such a pose would have to be founded on innate perversity!"

"Possible. Though even perversity is sometimes a pose. . . ."

But Ghirlaine heard, close beside her, Lady Glas-tenwold's lowered voice:

"Buck up, old girl, I've got bad news for you. Lemster's worse; and Vincent is starting north to-night. He's in the gallery at the end of the rooms. Come and bid him good-by. . . ."

Behind the last room, a glass gallery overlooked the gardens which lay behind the palace. There green lamps burned dimly amid potted plants. The outlines of statues loomed through shadowy foliage. The air was thick with the scent of azaleas and lemon-blossoms.

In the ballroom, dancing had recommenced. The gallery seemed deserted. But as Lady Maude disappeared, Vincent Pamfort came forward.

He was dressed for the journey. His baggage had gone to the station. He had barely time to catch the Paris Express.

Their hands met and twined together. At last:

"So you're leaving me. . . . I suppose Maude will follow you, now, after all. . . . And I shall be here alone. . . ."

They were silent, looking down, through the glass, at the fountain-basin and gravel paths of the garden, blanched by the starlight. He mused:

"It's the future that's beginning! To-day I turned in my papers. I'm a soldier no longer. Good old Egypt is done for."

"And now you'll not even get back to Rome!"

"I shall soon have to take over everything at home. It's you who must come to me. Come quickly, eh?"

"To-night it seems as if I were saying good-by to you for a long, long while."

"A week, a day, would be that!"

"I mean for longer than days and weeks and months."

He kissed her cold fingers.

"You're so deliciously different, Ghirlaine! So much less self-reliant! Almost appealing! And consequently, sweeter even than when I fell in love with you."

"Love weakens one, I think," she answered, lowering her head.

He put his hand under her chin, and looked in her eyes. What he seemed to read in them set him to trembling. His breath was short:

"How wonderful— That the goddess has turned to flesh and blood for me— You do love me, Ghirlaine!"

"If love means wanting you very near me, and being afraid to have you go, for fear it'll never be like this again——"

"That's impossible. Nothing can part us now!" He kissed her lips. For an instant she hung back, then, suddenly, clung tight to him. A wave of passion flowed through her, and, as it were, rushed out to him in that kiss. She was amazed at herself. And she amazed him? . . . She leaned against the window, her eyes half-closed, her temples throbbing. She heard him utter:

"Well, dear, it's good-by."

"Not that!"

"Till soon, then. *À bientôt*, you know."

"*À bientôt*."

He released her, paused to look again, departed. . . .

Another moment, and she wanted to call him back, to beg him to stay, or else to go with him.

"What folly!" she thought. "It's only come to pass as we expected! But the expectation of this is just what has been frightening me?"

And she felt, as never before, an awe of that future which is always veiled in darkness, which even the brightest optimism only appears to illuminate, but which sometimes a flash of premonition seems to reveal, for an instant, in a form altogether different from that contrived by one's hopes and plans.

What did the future seem to hold for her to-night? The peace she had dreamed of, in that fresh northern land toward which her lover was speeding? The serenity of such affection as he and she had promised each other? The protection of kindness and honor? The security of familiar, congenial places?

She heard again the low voice of Mme. Sémadéni:

"You are in danger. . . ."

"This is madness!"

She turned to leave that dim, oversweet gallery, to regain the bright rooms full of people whose minds were occupied with sane thoughts.

But in front of her the shadowy foliage parted. A tall, bulky figure loomed in the way. The green light of the lamps rested on the one face she did not want to see.

She stopped short. He remained motionless, looking at her.

With an effort, she recalled her composure. She would not give this moment significance, either by trying to escape it, or by meeting it with any appearance of irritation.

He said, in tones so natural that they caused her a shock of surprise:

"You're not dancing to-night, Miss Bellamy?"

And she tried to respond with her usual amiability.

"No. In fact, I'm just leaving."

He did not move aside. His mask-like countenance did not change. But he returned, very courteously:

"I'm sorry for that. I hoped to have another chat with you. A longer one than our first, a year and more ago. But perhaps in all this time you've forgotten me?"

She had no choice but to carry on his farce.

"Oh, no: I remember you perfectly, Mr. Maure. Would you mind looking out of the door to see if Lady Glastenwold's in sight?"

"Why not forget Lady Glastenwold for the moment? She, or some one else, will show up as soon as my luck begins to turn."

Again she attempted to treat him like any other man. With a laugh, she asked:

"You believe things depend on chance?"

"I believe things depend on the way one takes his chances."

"After all, that's rather abstruse for small talk, don't you think?"

"Who can be sure what is small talk and what is not? Words often tell us something quite foreign to the subject in hand. In fact, as a general thing, it's only when speech ceases that the truth is revealed."

The waltz music came to them very faintly. It was as if they two were drifting far from everything else in the world. And gradually the feeling pervaded her that no stranger was standing before her, but some one whom she was about to know to the depths of his heart.

She made a great effort to avoid that perception, to see, again, his external self alone. Her gaze fixed itself desperately on that marred sardonic visage. She tried to think of some word wherewith to break the silence that was revealing him. But no word came.

And before her reluctant intuition his physical part began, so to speak, to shred away, and leave his real personality naked.

She seemed to see a being consumed by flames, that leaped up to take the form of fantastic sins, then died down, to be instantly revived in shapes more monstrous still. They spread round him. They threatened her. They were on the point of wrapping her in their withering heat. And she could not retreat, or cry out for help, or raise before her the shield that had always made her invincible. She remained like one trapped by a conflagration from which there is no escape. . . .

All at once, she woke from this nightmare with a



start. The music had ceased. Laughing voices were drawing near.

How long had that silence endured? A moment, or an eternity?

He still stood there, motionless, calm, slightly smiling. She heard him say, in the same tone as before:

"Indeed, that's one reason why men so seldom stop talking. . . ."

Lady Glastenwold appeared through the foliage.

"Sorry to keep you waiting here." She recognized Sebastian Maure with a chilly nod. "Shall we say good-night to the Campobassi, and cut our stick?"

As Ghirlaine passed him, he stood aside with a bow. She lowered her eyes, so that he should not discern the fear in them. . . .

While the motor-car was taking the two women home, turning to Lady Maude she cried, in a voice aquiver with hysteria:

"I can't stand this place any longer! I'm going to leave!"

"Ah, my dear, I know how you feel. But unfortunately, you can't leave Rome just now. I didn't want to tell you up there: I thought you had enough rotten news for the moment. But they telephoned from the hotel that your aunt's down ill—in earnest, this time, poor soul! The doctor's been, and he thinks it's influenza. Really, you know, your steam-heated Americans ought to keep out of these cold museums. . . ."

But Ghirlaine was thinking of Mme. Sémadéni's words:

"Events descend upon us, of course. Out of what has been, and what is yet to be, they approach like great, slow-moving winged angels, each with his secret influence to work. And the wind of their wings sweeps us forward. . . ."

Toward what?

## CHAPTER IV

MRS. ALEXANDER BELLAMY endured for a week—though not by any means in silence—all the historic effects of influenza. Then, sitting up in bed, a clinical thermometer stuck rakishly out of one side of her mouth, she informed her physician, her nurse, her maid, and her niece, that she was going to breakfast on sausage and griddle-cakes.

"You may as well order it, Ghirlaine, because I am bound to have it. The worm will turn. All last night I dreamed of a porterhouse steak and hashed-brown potatoes."

"She's much better this morning," vouchsafed the doctor. "A little plain, nourishing food——"

"There is no such thing in this country," Mrs. Bellamy retorted. "It has got to be either fallals or slops. As it is, my sausages will probably be dressed up in paper petticoats, and my griddle-cakes covered with cinnamon and *zabaione*. It's only one more instance of the artificiality of these worn-out civilizations. As for Rome, there's nothing wholesome in it! Even the air is vitiated, as if those old Emperors and other vile creatures had breathed it up long ago. And that reminds me, my child. You've been in the house altogether too much, these last few days. You look pale. Your eyes are get-

ting shadowy. I insist on your going out and staying out. Since you enjoy these people, I forbid you to refuse any more of their invitations on my account. To-night you shall go with Donna Letizia to the Spanish Embassy and the opera. What piece are they giving?"

"*Salomé*," said Ghirlaine Bellamy.

"Thank Heaven I'm safe in bed!"

Ghirlaine sent for the motor-car, donned hat and furs, and called at the Grand Hotel. She hoped to find Lady Glastenwold still in. But at ten o'clock, on so fine a day, the Englishwoman was off already on one of those walks that might land her, round luncheon-time, far away in the country. Ghirlaine told the chauffeur to drive into the Borghese Gardens.

As the motor-car entered the park, she read again Vincent Pamfort's last telegram from England:

*No change. Writing. À bientôt. . . .*

Every morning, some such message came flying through space to reassure her. Never before had she felt a like need. The self-sufficiency which had not once failed her before was perhaps an inheritance.

The late Mr. Bellamy had possessed what is called a "strong character." His tastes, though fastidious, were, for a rich New Yorker, simple. His conscience was quick, his mind religious, his career irreproachable. He lived with books and works of art, surrounded by a small, select, rather staid coterie of

friends. He had always felt that to be born a Bellamy was to find oneself somewhat superior to the usual run.

Ghirlaine's mother had died soon after bringing her into the world. It was he who had ordered the girl's early outlook on life. She grew up in an environment at once edifying, sedate, and a trifle dull. Her natural purity, her instinctive conventional devoutness, had been well defended through those rather colorless years, and, apparently, fixed in her nature for good and all.

But at Mr. Bellamy's death, she soon issued, as had other girlhood friends before her, into more modern fields. There her name, beauty, and fortune combined to make her welcome. As was inevitable, in an age of international marriages, invitations soon drew her abroad. At last, thanks largely to her exceptional social charm and *savoir faire*, she had become a brilliant figure in the great world on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet all the airs of those continental ballrooms, charged, as it were, with a secret, illicit amorousness, had not affected her ideas of love and marriage. She still believed there must be, in this life, but one man for one woman. They two should meet, at last, as if on a wind-swept mountain-top, all the world's ignoble rumors inaudible far below, their souls full of reverence for the God who had brought them heart to heart.

Time and again, in these regions of cynicism and deceit, she had told herself she would only find that

elsewhere. However, she was always returning hither, half reluctant, half eager, the new young *mondaine* rejoicing in so much homage, the old Puritan in her vaguely apprehensive of something still undeveloped. . . .

But now, had she not found, after all, in the very midst of Vanity Fair, the road that was going to lead far away, to the serene and scrupulous future she longed for?

"If only it could have happened six months ago!"

So her thoughts returned again to Sebastian Maure.

Hitherto, she had encountered evil only in men held more or less in check by fear of public opinion. That kind could be met with a woman's ordinary weapons of self-defence. But might not such arms prove useless against this one, so notoriously derisive of all convention, so open in his enmity toward restraint? She felt the incertitude of an amazon, well enough equipped for accepted modes of combat, but suddenly confronted by an antagonist who is going to ignore all rules.

For she knew that if she stood her ground, if chance kept her here much longer, and perhaps even if she fled, a combat between them was inevitable.

Once more she tried to believe her apprehensions absurd. She was always surrounded by friends. Even in her moments of solitude, countless normal persons were close at hand. Besides, to-day, in the places where she moved, such a clash of hostile purposes could no longer be physical. In this age, a man, of no matter what recklessness, could gain no

advantage over a woman unless her moral resistance weakened.

In fact, since her loathing of Sebastian Maure was more intense every day, she ought to regard him with nothing except contempt.

And she put from her mind a dream of the night before—in which she had found herself sinking into a lurid sea, while struggling in his arms. . . .

Soon her aunt would be well. They would travel north. Everything would be different. . . .

The motor-car was running along beneath ilex-trees. All at once, Ghirlaine recognized, on the foot-path, Ernesto Sangallo. She halted the automobile. The novelist approached, hat in hand, his white teeth flashing behind his jet-black beard.

*"Fi donc, Monsieur! I thought you were always at work by ten."*

"I am working now. When I sighted you, 'he' was just asking, 'But can one find it here?' And 'she' was about to answer, 'If you are weak, you may have to seek it elsewhere. But if you are strong, of course, you can find it here.'"

While speaking, he looked at her attentively with his large, sympathetic eyes.

"And now," he added, briskly, "I'm going home to write it all down."

"Then let me give you a lift."

"But, dear lady—the appearances! You forget we're in Rome."

"Don't be absurd. As soon as you jump in my car you're on American soil. There we have fewer

of the appearances—and just as much of the substance.”

“More, much more,” he acknowledged, seating himself beside her. “I deplore this attitude that the Latin races force their young folk to assume toward one another. For really, you know, the fault isn’t in temperament, but in education, if Italian men have no genuine respect for women. It’s the mysterious, the unknown, that is dangerous. What is understood no longer disturbs.”

After a moment, she asked:

“Are you sure that what is understood no longer disturbs?”

“Certainly. The familiar is never terrifying, for instance.”

“But suppose one’s reluctant to familiarize oneself with what is evil?”

“That would be a mistake. For the minute you’ve fathomed evil, you perceive that it’s not really evil at all.”

The green foliage, touched here and there by a half-veiled marble figure, streamed past on either side. At length, she exclaimed:

“I can’t believe that! Some things, some persons, are bad through and through.”

“Nothing is bad through and through,” he responded, quietly.

Against her will, she pronounced the name she was trying to put from her mind:

“And, as an example, this—Sebastian Maure?”

Sangallo made no reply.



"You don't answer that!"

"Not because there's no answer. Only because, if you'll pardon me, I have no right to expose what I seem to see in that heart, to some one who has no interest in its welfare."

She felt that she had received a subtle, if unintentional reproach.

"At least, in such a beautiful place, we might find another subject. What about your characters, whose conversation I interrupted back there? 'He' had asked, 'Can one find it here?' Find what?"

"What are we all trying to find?" returned Sangallo.

"And her answer? That if he was weak, he would have to seek it elsewhere? That if he was strong, he could find it where he was?"

"Only a truism. The strong eventually find what they seek in their own souls, whatever their environment. The weak may need help from without—from other places, or other natures."

Ahead, the trees parted. A sunlit vista appeared, gold-drenched and indistinct, like a way leading far off to a place of dreams, too nearly perfect to be reality.

In low tones, she repeated:

"So it's the weak who must seek it elsewhere. . . . Why did you put that speech in the woman's mouth?"

"Because through the mouth of a woman so often come to us others truth, hope, salvation."

She said no more. He, for his part, seemed lost in

meditation, while gazing at her with a far-away look in his eyes. The motor-car flashed through the Pincian Gate, and slackened speed in the Via Veneto. The white façade of the Hotel Excelsior was in sight.

Ernesto Sangallo alighted, thanked her, and went away. She returned to the hotel, thinking:

"Is he, as people say, a visionary? Or has life such meanings, such answers?"

And she had a shrinkage of moral certainty and pride, a sense of having glimpsed, from a narrow harbor, a bit of the open sea. . . .

Indeed, she did not recover fully from these impressions till tea-time, when she dropped in at the Palazzo Campobasso.

It was twilight. On the "noble floor," a servant ushered her into a long room hung with yellowish Venetian brocade and spread with orange-colored Damascus rugs. Near the great carved fireplace, in a haze of cigarette-smoke, several persons were sitting round a tea-table.

Princess Campobasso came forward, in a clinging house-dress of violet silk, her red hair glinting like metal in the lamplight. Ghirlaine saw, behind her, rising out of the shadows, the fierce mustache of Marchese Tito, and Don Leone's receding forehead. There, too, appeared the soft brown hair and eyes of Donna Letizia Torquato, Mme. de Chaumont's *spirituelle* thin face, the watchful eyes of little Donna Isotta, Donna Dora in her upholstered wheel-chair, and Lady Glastenwold.

The Englishwoman's scarlet cheeks bore witness

to the long jaunt just finished. In that perfumed air, she spread round her a sweet scent of out-of-doors. She made Ghirlaine sit down beside her, squeezing her hand. For Vincent Pamfort's sister, though she had nearly all the true British prejudices, could not help being fond of at least this American girl!

In a guileless tone, she inquired:

"Anything new?"

"No. I called for you this morning."

"So sorry you didn't show up in time to go along. But then, poor old girl, you'd have balked at fifteen miles, and missed a wonderful day. I tramped half-way to Tivoli, and saw a long white beard floating through the olive-groves, and came on old Mr. Elzevir, mooning over the hillsides. I suspect when I hove along he was talking to the flowers. At any rate, he told me some remarkable things about them. This evening, it's just a little shocking to see Princess Betty wearing some. As if she had pinned on some little dead creatures that had been very wise and ambitious."

Princess Campobasso laughed, looked down at her orchids, and glanced at Marchese Tito.

"There's a horribly unromantic idea!"

"He's a strange old man, John Elzevir. A recluse, a teetotaler, a vegetarian——"

"No wine?" asked Tito, in alarm. "No meat?"

"Not even *poulet sauté*?" piped little Donna Isotta.

"Not even *tournedos Rossini*?"

"Not even a nice, crispy slice of bacon, my dear."

"I see nothing so strange in that," said Mme. de Chaumont, in her soft voice which was always a trifle unsteady. "Many men who are spiritually inclined——"

Donna Dora, nodding her small head solemnly, assented:

"In Lent, my brother always makes *magro* for the forty days."

"*Oi*," exclaimed Tito, shuddering, "that is piety! As for me, when I think of a beefsteak, I must have it! You should have seen us last night—or rather, this morning. That Sebastian Maure! *Per Bacco*, there's an appetite that has my admiration!"

"That's all he is, your Sebastian Maure—an appetite," Princess Betty retorted, with the frowning smile of a woman only playing at disapproval.

"And a terribly perverse one," added Mme. de Chaumont. "Those books of his are like a miasma in a house——" She stopped short. Her sensitive face slowly flushed.

"But," protested Leone, his watery eyes suffused with enthusiasm, "they're literature. They're the—What was it Hector said about them? 'The bright key to many long-imprisoned truths.'"

Donna Letizia regarded her son's weak countenance sadly. But Lady Glastenwold exclaimed:

"Fiddle-dee-dee! They're the key to a lot of wretched things that most of mankind, in civilized countries, have locked up, these days, in the depths of their natures."

"You're right," Donna Letizia assented. "Nearly

every one, I suppose, is more or less susceptible to perverse influences. But the perversities we don't know or think of, that are recalled to our minds or introduced to us, don't tempt us. When you make a bad idea familiar, it's apt to lose its repulsive look. Lord Chesterfield said if men stuck to their own vices things would be vastly better. If men were never tempted to descend below their own natural levels——"

"But, Mamma," said Don Leone, "Sebastian Maure is sincere. He believes in what he writes."

"And practises what he believes," interjected Princess Betty. "When he says one should take what he wants, he doesn't stop there! That affair in the Caucasus——"

Glancing at Donna Dora, she paused.

"By the way, how did that come out?"

"Well, of course, if it's true it was shocking. But thrilling, too. They say that as soon as the convent could send out an alarm, he was chased through the mountains by the father, the *fiancé*, and a swarm of retainers. No doubt all covered with bandoliers, and daggers, and so on! There was a running fight between the two parties. He got away, and worked down to the Caspian. They were looked for at every port. But unlimited money will do anything. In the end, or so the story goes, Persia swallowed them up."

"And what has become of her?"

"Who knows? I must ask Mme. Sémadéni. She's lived in the Caucasus."

"*Tch, tch!*" Tito shook his head, and helped himself to a buttered muffin. "I don't believe all that stuff. It's too deuced spectacular. We're in the twentieth century, now. Or is it the nineteenth? I can never remember."

"The twentieth century," said Donna Letizia, "only extends to the borders of civilization."

"And you know, Mamma," Don Leone suggested, slyly, "that even on Italian soil, when one gets down south, where Tito comes from——"

"Eh?" the Sicilian blurted out, after bolting a mouthful of muffin. "Miss Bellamy, I leave it to you—are these Romans narrow? Within five kilometres—in fact, just outside their marvellous city—you'll find human beings living in caves in the side of a hill."

"But in Sicily!" chuckled Don Leone, wriggling with delight. "In Sicily, some of them haven't come down on the ground. Grandpapa used to tell a story of a whole family, of four generations, who lived in a chestnut-tree. The old ones still wore little tails."

"Prince Torquato has his own sense of humor. Sicily is like anywhere else. Only, in many respects, much better."

"A lonely, wild, lawless waste!"

"Travel. It may broaden your mind."

"A place where anything might happen! Another Caucasus!"

"Another Paradise!"

"Then why are you up here?"

Tito risked a sidelong glance at Princess Betty, and twirled his mustache. She remarked:

"My dear Leone, soldiers can't always be where they'd like."

"Why did he become a soldier, then?"

Tito, leaning forward, replied, as ferociously as possible:

"Because I love the sight of blood! Because I dote on carnage!"

A new voice was heard:

"Could you guarantee us a little carnage on Thursday? Perhaps you'll remember we haven't killed for a week."

It was Don Livio Campobasso. Tall, immaculate, cool, his eye-glass flashing, he joined the circle. Sitting down, he whispered mysteriously in his daughter's ear. The child's face shone with a smile of pride. She got down from her chair, and prepared his tea-cup.

Princess Betty had one of those slight facial contractions which betray a yawn smothered as soon as begun. Her husband turned to Ghirlaine:

"You're coming out this week, I hope? I fancy the fine weather's set. We shall have a big field."

"Yesterday," said Tito, frowning at his sword-hilt like a man of affairs, "I sold a vast brute of a hunter to Maure."

"Good Heavens! Must the conversation always slip round to him?"

"As I'm not overfond of his company," Lady Glastenwold remarked, "I'm off. Besides, I've Brian Dungannan coming to dinner."

"The sculptor? Isn't he rather—original?"

"Delightfully so. But not in the Maurian sense

of the word. However, I'm planning to have three chaperons. If you think a woman of my looks really needs them."

"Is he going to marry his model, that peasant girl?"

"I shouldn't wonder. If it occurred to him some day."

"Rather breezy, your dinner-guest!"

"You wouldn't understand till you knew him. Quite illuminating, his point of view."

"Another bright key to many long-imprisoned truths?"

"Good-by. Coming, Ghirlaine? Thanks so much for the muffins. . . ."

Ghirlaine took Lady Maude to the Grand Hotel, and went home to dress.

That evening, she dined at Mme. de Chaumont's pretty *villino* near the Porta Pia.

De Chaumont had a good deal of money. He insisted on hospitality of a tone which made it rather doubtful whether his family tree was as well-rooted as he pretended in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The dinner-table, decorated with Parma violets and white lilacs, was laden with Venetian glassware and candle-sticks of carved gold. The *menu* proved to be somewhat too long. Most of the courses were composed of viands brought from a distance. The wines were exceptionally expensive. De Chaumont thought all this very smart.

His wife, who loved simplicity, and was not in sympathy with half the guests, could hardly have



seemed more amiable. She even charred the end of a cigarette, to give countenance to those ladies who wanted to smoke.

Ghirlaine sat between an officer of the German Emperor's Gardes du Corps, and the Chinese *chargé d'affaires*. The latter was a delicate, owlish courtier with shaven forehead, resplendent in mauve and apricot-colored silks. In fluent French, from which not even the "r's" were lacking, he discussed shipwrecks, Machiavelli, the Futurist School in painting. He admired the Futurists for one thing. With them, the nude was taboo, since the nude was no longer incidental to daily life.

To this, de Chaumont, with an exceedingly arch expression, was about to reply, when Mme. Berthe gave the signal to rise. It was after nine o'clock. Ghirlaine and Donna Letizia Torquato said good-night. They were bound for the reception of the Spanish Ambassador, and, later, the opera.

In the ample, gilded apartments of the Spanish Embassy, perhaps a hundred persons, on their way to the opera-house or dances, had already arrived. The anterooms were full of footmen in the orange-and-red Royal liveries of Spain. Beyond, the same long vistas appeared: high walls lined with tapestries, marble floors reflecting the light, ceilings covered with vivid legs and arms, glitter, vastness, formality. And the same diplomatic and military uniforms were collecting there, beneath the baroque chandeliers; the same smiles and bows were beginning; the same cross-glances and surreptitious contacts were in prepara-

tion; the same words of scandal, of destructive innuendo, and of betrayal, were ready to do their work. . . . Ghirlaine was glad when Donna Letizia suggested that the opera must have commenced. Once more on the staircase, she drew a deep breath, as if she had escaped from infected air. . . .

"What is the matter with me?" she thought, almost angrily, pulling her fur cloak about her with a shiver. "It seems that I can no longer see anything normally! . . ."

Outside the Palazzo Barberini they secured, from the tangle of vehicles, the old, boat-like carriage, drawn by a pair of those gigantic horses affected by the Torquato family. To a clatter of hoofs, they set out for the Costanzi.

Before the theatre, the carriage rumbled into an empty porte-cochère. The late-comers, entering, had their ears assailed by a harsh, discordant blare. The opera was in full blast.

An usher had opened the door of Donna Letizia's box, when a voice was heard behind them, raised in profane soliloquy. Down the corridor came Andreas Romanovitch, at a shambling trot, smiting his brow with a hand on which glittered some preposterous rings.

"Ghastly form of wit! Frightful ingenuity! The worst of it is, it really looks like me!"

The Russian perceived them. He stopped short. His eye-glass dropped. His forked beard sagged down.

"What looks like you, Monsieur Tchernaiëff?" laughed Donna Letizia.

"*Parbleu*, the head on the charger! I've just been behind the scenes and examined it. Take my word, the features are much too like to be so by accident. Some one's been playing a joke on me. What's more, I know whose wretched, sardonic humor I suspect!"

"Who is the *Salomé* to-night?"

"Fiammetta Innocenti."

"Come in with us, and see what she's doing."

"Please excuse me! I watched the last rehearsal. Such relish, in such a part, is too terrifying for me. I advise you to turn round and let me take you home."

"Later, perhaps."

"Have your way. But you will suffer!"

He disappeared. Donna Letizia and Ghirlaine entered the box.

Round the darkened auditorium, the three tiers of boxes, and the two galleries above, bore up innumerable vague faces. Against the green rim of footlights, the conductor's arms moved rhythmically.

On the stage, before the moonlit palace of *Herod*, *Salomé* was singing in the ear of *John the Baptist*. One saw a blonde, pallid creature, crimson-mouthed, of a snake-like suppleness, clad in a transparent robe that seemed little more than moonbeams. She approached the ragged saint, then shrank away, with provocative gestures, diabolically ingenious and graceful. Her thin voice, acrid with the timbre of hysteria, sounded strange depths of emotional perversity. She was not a woman, but the personification of eroticism, harassing purity.

"I will kiss your lips, Iokanaan. . . . I will kiss your lips. . . ."

Ghirlaine shuddered. From the stage was wafted forth, on those wellnigh intolerable waves of sound, a disordered sensuality. This influence approached her, enveloped her, recalled to her another influence that it resembled—that had enwrapped her, one night, in the shadowy palm-gallery of the Palazzo Campobasso.

And the feeling stole over her that somewhere, in this breathless audience, his eyes, and thoughts, were fixed on her again.

She made out, in a near-by box, Princess Campobasso's tense figure, and behind her Tito's eyes dilated in bewilderment. Farther on, she saw Don Leone's open mouth, and Hector de Chaumont's face, full of somnolent delight. At a distance sat Mme. Sémadéni. She was not looking at the singer, but at something, or some one, straight across the theatre, lost in the gloom.

Whom was she staring at so curiously?

But Mme. Sémadéni was looking now at Ghirlaine.

## CHAPTER V

WHEN the curtain fell, Sebastian Maure left his seat, went back to the end of the first-tier corridor, and descended upon the stage.

*Herod's* palace was tumbling apart. The gilt cuirasses of the Tetrarch's guard were disappearing into the wings. Mechanics in long, dirty blouses swarmed everywhere.

The intruder, with the assurance of one who has paid his way, passed behind the back drop, climbed a staircase, and knocked on a shabby door. Inside, a little dog raised a falsetto bark.

*"Avanti!"*

He entered *Salomé's* dressing-room.

The place was brilliantly lighted, small, and hot. At a disorderly toilet-table sat Fiammetta Innocenti, her wig off, a towel round her neck, her face covered with a mixture of make-up and olive-oil. Behind her, a short fat woman was whisking out of the way a tiny Florentine dog, pale-yellow, shaved like a poodle. But the beast continued to yelp at him spasmodically.

To this greeting the singer added a scream of her own, when she saw who was there:

*"Get out! How dare you!"*

*"I never let people change their minds at my expense."*

He sat down on a trunk, picked up an atomizer, and sprayed his chin with *verveine*. She glanced at him keenly, then shrugged her shoulders.

He had drunk too much with his dinner. Just now, however, his mind was rather more active than usual. But this activity was veiled by his customary impassive manner. Even so expert a student of mankind as the Innocenti was baffled.

"I thought," she confessed, while rubbing her cheeks with the towel, "that it was Andreas. Or Marchese Tito. Or the Director."

"Why every one else, but not me?"

"Because I have grease all over my face."

"I've seen that before, somewhere or other."

"Not here."

"There always has to be a first time."

"I differ."

But she smiled at herself in the mirror. He failed to respond to that.

"You prefer olive-oil, I see, in this incarnation? When you were Poppæa Sabina, you know, it was asses' milk. There were five hundred of them, shod with silver and covered with nets of Tyrian purple. They ambled behind your carriage when you and Nero junketed down to Baia."

"What nonsense! There's not enough grease in asses' milk to take off paint." She added, in the rough Neapolitan dialect:

"Wine for dry throats, bread for flat stomachs, the gallows for fools—and grease for make-up!"

"I suspect that saying, in its original form, belongs to the Camorra."

"Perhaps," she replied, indifferently. "If, indeed, there is such a thing any more."

This remark he had heard delivered solemnly by more than one desperate character in the south, bent on amusement at the expense of a foreigner. It suggested to Sebastian that the Innocenti herself might have been mixed up, at some time or other, with the "Beautiful Reformed Society." That would hardly be surprising. The Camorra had members in nearly every walk of life, from the gutter to the Chamber of Deputies. And this singer had been born in the slums of Naples.

She was one of those rare products of the depths whom ambition predestines to an extraordinary career. Her natural talent had been helped by her strangely unplebeian good looks. Her intelligence had taken advantage of every chance for self-betterment. With all this, she had a reputation for absolute cynicism. At least one young man had attempted her life, and then killed himself, because she had used him long enough.

"Where is Andreas to-night?" she inquired, while powdering her throat.

She had quickly resumed her habitual attractiveness. Despite her history, she displayed a face of peculiar innocence—large-eyed, clear-browed, almost childlike. Only her lips were a trifle too full. As Sebastian Maure had said, she resembled the bust of Nero's wife in the Uffizzi Gallery.

"I haven't seen Andreas this evening. Maybe he's noticed the head on the charger, and gone home to sulk."

"Why did you do that? I can't see the point."

"He'll see it, though."

"But it isn't necessary to kill Andreas, in order to kiss him."

"All the same, there's a certain resemblance."

Steps sounded outside the door. At that moment, she sneezed: perhaps some powder had flown up her nose. But Sebastian recalled the old signal of caution used by the *Camorristi*. By way of reply, he imitated the mew of a cat, which meant, in the same code, "Here comes the victim." She turned round in amazement. He was still grinning at her when he marched Andreas, Tito, and de Chaumont.

"Wretched *fumiste!*" the Russian shouted at Sebastian Maure. "When that head appeared out of the well, all the Hunt Club box rolled round on their chairs. The scene was spoiled. I presume you're here to apologize?"

Looking at Fiammetta askance, he added, reflectively:

"If not, what the devil is he doing in this galley?"

"Are these gentlemen your seconds?" inquired Sebastian.

"Many, many thanks! I'll wait till your hand and eye are more unsteady. Life may be all sorts of a bore; but I know some pleasanter ways of withdrawing from it."

The Innocenti gazed at Sebastian Maure.

"Have you killed many men in duels?" she asked him. Her red lips parted in almost infantile anticipation. Andreas growled:



"To look at him you might know he's smashed each of the Ten Commandments into bits. It's the grief of his life that there aren't but ten to break. He has a grudge against Moses on that account."

"Sacrilege!" Fiammetta declared, and turned grave. Andreas, for his part, looked startled.

"So it is," he assented, in humble tones. "And I ask pardon of God."

"Good," exclaimed Fiammetta. "And now, get out at once, all of you, and let me dress."

"Is it absolutely necessary to be so cruel?" asked de Chaumont, simpering.

"Naturally. You can see for yourself that while you're in here there's no room."

Sebastian stood up.

"Poppæa, you're coming with us to supper."

It was less an invitation than a command. She looked at him in astonishment; her eyes flashed; then an expression of pleasure touched her face. No doubt she found it a new experience to be ordered about by a man. But, immediately recovering herself, she began to make conditions:

"Any more women?"

"Why should there be?"

"Then I accept—if I may eat garlic."

"We'll all eat garlic," de Chaumont assured her, with his hand on his heart.

"That won't be necessary, Monsieur," she retorted, and slammed the door. . . .

The Regina was a restaurant the real life of which began round midnight. Inside the vestibule, a door

on the left gave access to a long room where one might sup surrounded by officers, actresses, young nobles, and *demi-mondaines*. But those who preferred seclusion passed this door by, traversed a dark alley covered with trellises, and found, toward the rear of the building, aligned against the exterior wall, a row of *cabinets particuliers*. In one of these, Sebastian Maure ensconced his party.

Fiammetta, who had not dined before singing, was hungry. They ate an Italian meal—a soup of mullet, lobster, cuttle-fish, whiting, and mussels; red mushrooms stewed in oil, tomatoes and garlic; sucking-goat in a sauce of chillies and anchovies, and a salad of white truffles from Piedmont. But every one drank with each course whatever he liked. The wine-bottles and liqueur-flasks formed a phalanx on the table.

Smoke filled the air. The Innocenti, who had to choose between hoarseness and masculine resentment, resigned herself to the former.

The room boasted a large oil-painting of a nymph, a sofa, and a piano. Andreas, sitting down at this instrument, dashed off the first bars of a *scherzo*. But no two octaves were in tune. A groan rose from his audience. Tito dragged him off the piano-stool.

“*Che porcheria*—what a mess!”

“No fault of mine,” Andreas replied. “In fact, I think this is the very machine that Leone filled with *Asti spumante*.”

“Leone will never grow up if he lives to a hundred.”

“He’ll surprise every one if he lives to thirty!”

"What could you expect of a house that's been too proud for five hundred years to marry beneath it? The old Prince is crazy. Donna Letizia's husband used to chase the family priest round the table. This boy's making haste to kill himself before he dies of neurasthenia. One has to pity his mother. She's good stock; but they let her into the Casa Torquato too late to save the line. In fact, that family is in the *purée*."

"And the Brazzazzi? If they're to continue, Don Giulio will have to look sharp."

"Oh, no house can be called extinct while the distaff side remains."

"Donna Dora? One doesn't marry an invalid, no matter how big her dowry. Any man her equal in rank would want also a healthy mother. One always thinks of the children. It's human nature."

Thus Tito. But Fiammetta corrected him:

"Princes think of them—beforehand—because they have something fine to leave them."

"Perhaps," said Andreas, "some of us have too much affection for our unborn children to wish them the tragedy of becoming our heirs."

The Innocenti protested:

"*Caro mio*, if you intend to take life seriously again to-night, I'm going home to Ki-ki. Santa Eufemia Vergine deliver me hereafter from a man with a conscience!"

"Hereafter!" Andreas turned to Sebastian. "My poor friend, she says to my face that I'm only an episode."

Sebastian glanced at Fiammetta. She was leaning forward, her elbows on the table, her polished finger-nails curled up under her full, round chin. Her eyes were fixed on him with a sort of blank, misty speculation. And there flashed between them two looks, more subtle than question and answer—the swift intercourse of two natures that recognize each other. . . . But instantly, he made his eyes illegible. She straightened herself, almost angrily, with a flush, like one who has had an unaccustomed, and unexpected, rebuff.

Sebastian replied to Andreas:

“Eh, we’re all episodes! Though few have courage enough to admit it. Take more champagne. The churches will all be open again to-morrow. . . . Three hundred and fifty churches, basilicas, and cathedrals, with little episodes running in and out of them! Wait a minute, though! The marriages aren’t so ridiculous, after all!”

Throwing back his head, he uttered a harsh, barking laugh. Fiammetta involuntarily crossed herself.

His hour for outrageous conversation had nearly struck. The Innocenti, perceiving this, looked round for her furs. She could stand everything but blasphemy. Besides, she was trembling with the suppressed indignation of a woman who has been tempted to make an advance in vain.

But, when she rose, he did not try to detain her. For he had already reached the conclusion he had been seeking, and on account of which he had asked her to supper.

"I, too," stammered Andreas. "Some one must see her home."

"And I, with a wretched headache," added de Chaumont, trying to catch Fiammetta's eye.

Tito muttered something about an early ride with Sangallo.

"Good-night, then. And tell the waiters not to disturb me."

"You'll stay by yourself?"

"I sha'n't be lonely."

He waved them out, his big hands beating the air as if to disperse them with the smoke. As they left, he heard Fiammetta whisper, with an accent of spite:

"No doubt he means the Devil will keep him company. . . ."

When their footsteps had died away, he gave vent to an exclamation of disgust.

"Pouah! To think I expected to be satisfied again——"

He emptied his glass, leaned back in his chair, and reflected.

For a week, he had thought of nothing but Ghirlaine Bellamy. The remembrance of her had filled his sleep with dreams. Out of doors, at twilight, tall women's shapes, flitting through the shadows, had called up recollections of hers. To-night, while watching her in the Costanzi, his desire for her had seemed insupportable.

Yet her antipathy made her heart as nearly inaccessible as if she lived in another world. Before her nobility, for the first time in his life his self-confidence

failed him. He had even been tempted to smother the thought of her in other experiences, susceptible to his influence. But, on approaching this venture, he had realized that nothing else would do now. It was not perversity that he wanted, but her white self, that hated him.

"I've never failed yet, in anything I set my hand to. Something will happen. Presently I shall find the answer. . . ."

Thus he continued to search his mind, fumed with the haphazard ingenuities of intoxication.

"It will come to me. If only I can remember it in the morning. . . ."

But in the morning he recalled distinctly nothing that had followed except a dream, in which he had seemed to be dragging her down from a great height, into black waves. . . .

Lying abed, he concluded that he had reached the most intense emotional crisis of his life. He was sure that his future was going to be profoundly affected by her. And he was convinced that hers would not be unchanged. For he believed that no one is attracted to another so strongly unless the two have something vital in common. He felt that she must contain, in the depths of her nature, some very important quality sympathetic to him.

How to discover it?

He enjoyed an almost clairvoyant perception of human nature, up to the point where its higher life began. Moreover, those who held that the feminine is mysterious had earned, hitherto, nothing but his

amusement. Yet there was no doubt that this girl still puzzled him.

"After all, every problem is merely a question of patience."

His intellect, his physical strength—which was exceptional—and his wealth, had always been taxed in the interests of perversity. Some men are fated to wander through life as if through endless subterranean vaults, whose high windows are sealed against the sunshine. Sometimes these sealed casements never open.

"That face of a young saint, and that figure of Diana squeezed into a costume from the Place Vendôme! Curious mutual concession. . . ."

He stopped talking to himself. His valet was standing beside the bed.

This servant was small and wiry, with a visage that seemed to have been carved out of wood and then covered with dark wax. He was usually taken for a Turkoman or a Tartar. In his passports he went by the Greek name, Disnisius Pappachzistos. He spoke several languages, knew many countries, and whether in Paris or Bokhara made no difficulty of the most unusual commissions.

Sebastian Maure, ten years before, in St. Petersburg, had dragged him out of a wardrobe in the Hotel d'Europe. At that time, the fellow had possibly been, as he declared, a hotel spy of the Russian Secret Service. If so, he had thrown over this berth to follow a master whose prodigality and adventurous habits had made his old post appear unprofita-

ble and tame. Not long afterward, in the Caucasus, Sebastian Maure had saved his life, because "it would be too tiresome to break in a new numskull." From that day, the man had been like a slave.

Sebastian sat down in a brocaded arm-chair. The valet, dashing some toilet-water into a silver mug, mixed a lather. Presently, when the razor was running over his throat, Sebastian remarked:

"It's some little time since you have been home, Disnisius."

"Many years, master," replied the servant, respectfully.

"Your native place is still Balikisri, in Asia Minor?"

"Why should I lie to you, master? You are my father and mother."

"Balikisri, eh? Near Constantinople? What is there?"

"Hills, a river, houses, dogs, men, and women. And much dirt."

"So you are never homesick?"

"Oh, I shall go back some day."

"If it's a girl, she would be rather ugly by this time."

"It is not a girl. Only an enemy, Excellency."

Sebastian yawned with care.

"You leave him alone so long he'll forget you."

The man made no reply at once. Finally, poising the razor:

"He will hardly forget me, Excellency. Every month I send him a letter, telling him I am coming



back some day. Meanwhile, he is growing rich. When he's as rich as he can be, I will go home."

As the razor was passing the jugular vein, he added:

"What use, to have killed him when he had nothing? To kill him when he has everything to lose is much better."

Sebastian felt his lips twitching.

"You will make me laugh, Disnisius, and then you will cut me."

"Laugh if you wish to, master. I shall not cut you," said Disnisius in a gentle voice.

"A most satisfactory servant," thought Sebastian. Aloud:

"You may take the rest of those cravats we got at Doucet's last Fall."

"The rest?"

"The ones you haven't already stolen."

"Many thanks, master," murmured Disnisius, shutting the razor. "Shall I lay out a braided coat for this afternoon?"

"I'm going to call on a sculptor of genius. What regalia does your varied experience suggest?"

"Ah, then it would doubtless be tweeds. And perhaps a mauve tie. I say mauve, because there will be more color in your Excellency's face, when your Excellency has had some Burgundy with his breakfast. Massage?"

"Certainly. And be quick about it."

But two o'clock had struck before he was ready to go out.

He told the cab-driver to take him to Mons Tarpeo, on the Capitol Hill. There, midway of a street pent in by yellow walls, he entered a big, shabby house, and climbed four flights of stairs to Brian Dungannan's studio.

The large room was flooded with sunshine that streamed through a skylight. One saw wooden chairs, a threadbare divan, and many plaster casts. A young man in a blouse was at work on a life-sized marble statue, which he was pretending to file round the ankles. He had curly red hair, honest eyes, of emerald-green, slightly inflamed by marble-dust, and a broken nose awry amid many freckles. He was grumbling in Italian:

"Make them thinner, says the old imbecile. I will not make them thinner by so much as a millimetre! But she's thin herself, says he: if her ankles are not, that's her fault. *Stupido!* Her ankles are much more beautiful so than spindling. Now they speak of a life afoot. The spring of grass under the heel from morning till night. The rush of clean air round the body. Camilla, if your ankles got spindling, I should pack you off home to Ariccia!"

He nodded severely at the statue.

It portrayed a tall, slim maiden halting between two steps, head up, in a splendid attitude of alarm. There was something fay-like about both face and figure—the look of a wild thing taking fright, the pure naturalness of untrammelled muscles contracting for headlong escape.

When this almost vital creation remained unre-

sponsive, the sculptor recollected himself, looked over his shoulder, and repeated:

"You hear, Camilla? Home like a shot!"

And he laughed at a handsome, long-limbed girl who sat in a corner, demurely knitting, the sun on her copper-colored hair.

Near by, smiling also, lounged Ernesto Sangallo.

Then they saw Sebastian Maure in the doorway.

When he had examined and praised the statue, he scrutinized the original.

He had heard of this peasant girl from the Alban village famed for its pretty women. She came of a family of artists' models. A year before, she had knocked on Dungannan's door, in her search for work. She was still here.

Her face was grave and sweet, with the artlessness of very simple, almost aboriginal natures—something decidedly different from the apparent artlessness of the usual Italian peasant.

Dungannan remarked, in English:

"Now you see what I've tried to reproduce. Here and there, in this country, you'll find an individual that all the slave-hordes of ancient Rome, all the rabble of barbarian conquerors, hasn't adulterated. This one is the double of her first native ancestress, who prostrated herself, in the fields, before some unusual-looking stone, that represented her idea of divinity. She belongs to the age of centaurs, and fauns, and satyrs. She's one of the rarest, most precious things in the world—and I love her for it! Some day, I suppose I shall have to marry her,

more's the pity! Like plucking a dryad out of her nest, and haling her up to strange altars! It seems much more appropriate that we should just go away, hand in hand, into the woods forever." He turned again to Sebastian. "Have you ever thought of going away with some one into the woods forever? Most people would consider that sad. They're wrong. Everything is there. The nearer we approach the primitive, the plainer we see."

Sebastian contemplated them both, clear-eyed and frank in the sunshine, radiant with an inexplicable serenity. And suddenly he felt jealous. For this was a new sort of lawlessness, so innocent that none could reproach them for it, that few could help envying them. They seemed to belong to the youth of the world, to a time when there was no right or wrong.

"I think," he said, "you two, if any, ought to find your old gods in the forest. Though even the most liberal theologians have pronounced them all dead."

"Are the old gods dead?" quoted Brian Dungan. "Not they; but maybe they think we are!"

"He's a pagan," declared Sangallo, regarding the sculptor affectionately.

"I've been called that, too," Sebastian Maure replied, somewhat grimly. "In my case the term is abusive."

"Every man has his own interpretation of words. That depends on how far his search has progressed."

"Search for what?" asked Sebastian, who felt in the mood for hostilities.

"For what we're all hunting, some with open eyes, some blindly. Old John Elzevir, out toward Tivoli, is searching among his bees and his flowers. The poor wretch in the Trastevere quarter, who'll do a murder to-night, is searching no less, though he doesn't know it."

"One moment——"

But Sangallo, smiling, avoided that encounter.

"My dear friend, you and I would never get anywhere with that argument!" As if to change the conversation still more, he returned to Italian:

"You're coming out to the Meeting to-morrow, at Nero's Tomb?"

"Perhaps. Who generally shows up?"

"The old set, and a few new amazons. Madame Sémadéni invariably. Lady Glastenwold usually——"

Camilla looked up from her knitting. In a rich, contralto voice:

"That's the English Princess who came to drink tea and was nice to me. She is *simpatica*."

"The Glastenwolds," Dungannan explained, "have a place that marches with father's, in County Clare. A fine woman. The open-air sort."

"Her brother," remarked Sangallo, "is a first-rate fellow. Vincent Pamfort. You know him, Maure?"

"I think not."

"He showed us some wonderful jumping last month. But then, being English, no doubt he felt that a little more than the usual was expected. We miss him."

Camilla, resting her work on her lap, asked Dunggannan:

"Bree-an, will the Signorina Bellamy go to *Inghilterra* to marry him?"

Sebastian felt sure he could not have heard aright. But Dunggannan, with a laugh of vexation, reproached her:

"Foolish child! When the English lady told me that, it was meant to be a great secret."

She gazed at him with startled eyes.

"Then I have done wrong again! . . ."

The blood rushed to Sebastian's head. He tried to control his features. But Sangallo was staring. He heard himself say, in an unnatural voice:

"That's news. . . ."

"Don't let it go any farther."

"I? Certainly not."

"You, too, Ernesto."

"I'd already surmised—that much," Sangallo replied, his gaze still fixed on Sebastian's face.

## CHAPTER VI

NEXT morning, soon after nine o'clock, many smart vehicles took the Nomentana Road, for the rendezvous of the Roman Hunt.

The carriages had the start—broughams, traps of young officers drawn by scampering cobs, a coach or two, horse-cabs, and even basket-carts. But all these were soon overtaken by the motor-cars, flashing, in the clear sunshine, through amber dust, amid which appeared top-hats and ladies' derbies, coats of fur and "pink," the blue and gray mantles of the cavalry.

The northern suburbs shaken off, one saw on either hand brown undulations, spreading afar toward a misty frame of hills. The distant summits lifted their snows against a cloudless sky. It was a winter day without a flaw—of azure melting into the purple of mountain ranges, of gold dissolving into the russet of sun-dried grass.

The procession streamed under the arches of an ancient bridge: below, the Anio twisted, silvery and thin, amid its willows. Farther on, the land was almost empty, even of farms and herdsmen's shelters. On every side lay the billowy desolation that envelops Rome, in the vast hummocks of which one seems to see the burial-ground of long-dead, gigantic splendors, whose monuments are all effaced.

To the left, a narrow road branched off. All vehicles turned into it. Presently, a farm appeared—rough walls among scrubby trees, dirty children at gaze, earth-colored peasants standing motionless in distrustful attitudes.

Every one alighted here, climbed a knoll, and looked down on the place of rendezvous.

A hillside descended to a great hollow in the plain. Near by, a few fragments of brick and marble, grass-grown, sinking into the ground, marked the spot of Nero's death. Farther down, a refreshment tent had been pitched. Already, white-aproned waiters were setting the long table and drawing corks. Beyond, grooms and orderlies were leading about their masters' hunters. The huntsman, his horn between the buttons of his red coat, sat his horse amid the pack.

Ghirlaine and Lady Glastenwold found their hunters waiting for them in the hollow.

Not far off, Don Livio, in his black plush cap of Master, was questioning two *fattori*, or farm-managers. These men were mounted on shaggy ponies, and dressed, for this occasion, in blue coats, with silver buttons which bore the crests of the noble houses that they served. They pointed from time to time across the tawny undulations toward the east.

Tito was dodging among the pale capes of his brother officers. He made toward Princess Betty, whose long coat of leopard-skin could be seen behind a hedge of scarlet backs. But her velvet hat proclaimed that she had come out merely to watch the



start. Everywhere, in fact, such millinery mingled with the sedate head-gear of ladies who were going to ride. The spectators were more numerous than the field.

Some young men, in tweeds, gaiters, and caps, sauntered round with complacent expressions, convinced that they looked quite English. By the tent, Don Leone was drinking a whiskey-and-soda. Though hunting was too great a tax on his strength, he had donned a suit of homespun, covered with tiny knots of blue, crimson, and orange wool.

Several ladies were petting the hounds, a fine pack, of thirty couple. Little Donna Isotta approached them, urged by her governess, and followed by a big man-servant, the collar and cuffs of his livery embroidered with the Campobasso insignia. But the child soon tired of all those wagging tails. With precocious composure, she fixed her eyes on Miss Bellamy.

Ghirlaine threw her a kiss, then saw Mme. Sémadéni. The Russian appeared more serpentine than ever in her black habit. She was lighting a cigarette from de Chaumont's tinder-box.

But Ghirlaine's view of them was cut off by Donna Letizia and Ernesto Sangallo. As these approached, she heard the words:

"We must get up a fair at the Grand. A calendar-sale? A cinematograph show? If we set out to take tuberculous babies, and they send them on from elsewhere, all the better. It's only a question of money. . . ."

They saw Ghirlaine, and came forward smiling.

"You two! Do you never meet without planning good works? You must let me in on this."

"On what?" asked Lady Glastenwold, riding up, a flat little derby crammed down over her eyes.

"We were talking charity."

"Not in favor of the fox, I hope?"

"As if he needed it!" cried Andreas Romanovitch, appearing from nowhere, with a flourish of his top-hat. "These days, the only thing we seem likely to accomplish is to make him die from laughing at us."

"Every year," Sangallo remarked, "the rascals move out farther from the city."

"And consequently force us to get up always a little earlier in the morning. *Parbleu*, when one thinks of it, they have a cheek! To-day, for instance, they've cost me my beauty sleep."

"Your what?" inquired de Chaumont, joining the circle with Mme. Sémadéni.

Andreas, turning to his countrywoman, protested:

"Am I not considered dangerously good-looking according to Russian standards?"

"Perhaps," de Chaumont suggested, in flute-like tones, "that's why one finds so many Russian ladies travelling?"

"But certainly. For they began to do so in earnest—I refer you to the Bureau of Passports—only after I set out myself. But I shall never marry," he added, shooting a melancholy glance at Ghirlaine. "I mean to say, not immoderately."

"I should think," suggested Sangallo, "that mat-

rimony, in moderation, might even improve you. If the lily can really be painted."

Mme. Sémadéni said:

"The daughter of the Brazilian Minister is staring at you now, with her soul in her eyes. She'd look very well at court in the *sarafane* and the *kokochnik*."

"Dear lady, I naturally don't want my wife to be as intelligent as I; but I should require at least a few glimmerings. That sweet-faced girl shows up at all these festivities on a kicking horse."

"Disgusting!" exclaimed Lady Glastenwold, glaring round. "All the same, I see some one whose wretched brains might be kicked out very advantageously."

By the tent, in a crowd of uniforms, Sebastian Maure was standing.

His burly shoulders stretched the scarlet cloth of his coat. His long legs swelled out beneath the white folds of his riding-breeches. He took a cigarette from his lips, thrust up his heavy chin, and expelled a deep laugh, that was echoed by half a dozen voices.

Ghirlaine averted her eyes—to find Sangallo looking at her intently.

Sebastian Maure watched the novelist put her on her horse. Her black hat and dress made her hair appear a paler gold, her skin a rarer pink and white, than usual. Indeed, the texture of her face seemed, in this brilliant sunshine, to have become translucent. And the long contours of her figure, sharply defined by the habit and her present attitude, re-

vealed at once a pure simplicity and a subtle richness.

He thought of Galatea, not yet transformed from marble to flesh, but too disturbing not to contain the possibilities of an all-human wakening. Again he seemed to discern, beneath that coldly beautiful exterior, a secret creature, capable of flaming divinely into passion, some day, for some one.

For whom? For the man she had promised to marry?

He suppressed an almost homicidal smile.

The pack, driven in by huntsman and whip, was approaching through the crowd. Prince Campobasso followed, with the nucleus of his field. The officers round the tent shed their cloaks and scattered toward their horses. Everywhere, above moving heads, men and women were rising into the saddle.

As the cavalcade set off behind the hounds, Sebastian found himself with Andreas Romanovitch. The sun was in their faces.

"I know a Russian who looks seedy this morning."

"The truth is, Sebastian of my heart, that I am frightened stiff. Some day I shall break my neck at these idiotic antics. Last night I had thirteen drinks. This morning, there was a black cat in the vestibule. When I left the house, a hunchbacked woman ran into me. Yes: I think it will be to-day. A pity! I had a most interesting engagement for to-morrow. But as all the papers will mention it, she'd hardly show up. Unless she believes in spiritism. Even so——"

"What the deuce do you hunt for?"

"Lots of men kill themselves at the altar of public opinion. At any rate, this will be as *chic* a death as any. And in a sufficiently handsome setting! Look at that landscape. Even you ought to see the artistry of Providence in it."

The other replied, indifferently:

"How beautiful it would be if Corot had painted it."

"Corot!"

"Certainly. He, at least, would have known what to suppress."

"*Poseur!*"

Sebastian yawned, and they rode on in silence.

At last, Andreas, peering ahead into the thick of the crowd, inquired:

"Can you see who's going to pilot Miss Bellamy?"

"Tito, I should judge."

"He'll lead her up to all the stiff fences. So precious a creature ought to ride with some one who knows what fear is like. Will you come along?"

"Thanks. I'll play my own game, I think."

Andreas, humping his shoulders, trotted forward.

The pack moved on eastward. The field followed quietly behind the Master, alert, reins well in hand. For in the Campagna the foxes were not found in coverts, but in the open.

Suddenly, a stir went through the field. Ahead, the hounds were speeding away in full cry. The pink coats of huntsman and whip flew after them. To a thud of hoof-beats, the field set off.

Andreas gained Ghirlaine's side as the rush began.

With a tragic grimace, he clutched his hat and plunged forward at her elbow. But Tito, on her other hand, soon called to her:

"Pull out! He won't hold up-wind for long."

"Don Livio doesn't cut."

"He means to go round that plateau. If we top it, we'll show the whole crowd our backs."

"But what's beyond?" shouted Andreas.

"Leave that to me, old Cossack! I know this place like my hand."

The three swerved northward. A few moments later, the pack was streaming parallel to their course. The whole field was turning.

"What did I tell you!" cried Tito.

Already the riders had scattered. Red coats, black habits, uniforms, skimmed into sight here and there on high ground, next instant to disappear into hollows. The rush of air, the dull rataplan of hoofs, the faint clamor of hounds, filled Ghirlaine with recklessness. Her habitual self was being swept back, by the singing air, toward the regions of every-day. But she urged her horse to bear her on ever faster. Her instinct seemed to recognize, in these savage emotions, not retrogression, but progress! There before her, in the midst of desolate, dangerous 'vistas, she glimpsed, as it were, for one moment, the riddle of happiness. . . .

They went down a long stretch of hillside. The plateau rose before them. Their hunters attacked the slope. The rest of the field, however, was scurrying eastward again. Andreas warned Tito that they were losing the others.

"Let them go. They're afraid of this hill, that's all."

The three reached the summit in a scrambling rush—and desperately drew rein.

They were on the brink of an almost perpendicular bluff. Loose earth, streaked with stony waterways, ran down thirty feet to the plain. Marchese Tito, leaning over his horse's neck, examined this precipice with a fallen jaw.

"Capers! I must have been thinking of the land round Divino Amore!"

Andreas, gazing eastward at the fast-disappearing field, stuck his tongue in his cheek.

"Hair-brained Sicilian! When you become Master, the Hunt will need parachutes."

Tito flushed violently beneath his swarthy skin. In a voice hoarse with suppressed anger, he retorted:

"Whatever you wish, of course! All the same, if we three were all men——"

Ghirlaine nearly laughed outright.

"Well, Marchese?"

His eyes gleamed with foolhardy determination to wipe out his disgrace.

"Then I should have said, 'What odds? Follow me!'"

And he jerked his horse's head round toward the precipice.

She stifled a cry of alarm. Andreas spurred forward. But it was too late to stop Tito. Lying back almost flat against his hunter's rump, he went over the edge.

The two spectators held their breath. The horse's

forelegs, stiffly braced, seemed every instant about to be overbalanced. But the dexterous beast, neck arched, haunches trembling, his dainty hoofs slipping midst rivulets of gravel, had almost reached the bottom before he lost footing.

There was a crash, a confusion of man and horse, a cloud of dust. At the foot of the precipice, the hunter rolled over and scrambled upright. Tito sat on the ground, with a pale, foolish face, one hand pressed against his side. After carefully poking at his tunic, he vouchsafed, indignantly:

"How absurdly fragile are ribs!"

The others rode rapidly along the plateau to its end, descended in safety, and galloped back. The soldier received them grinning. His anger had vanished.

"Andreas, you're going to miss the rest of your hunting."

"I, too," said Ghirlaine, and prepared to dismount.

"You, Miss Bellamy? No, indeed! You must ride on at once. The runs are never long. You can easily catch the rest."

"Marchese, you ask me to leave you here?"

"Why not, *per Bacco*? I'm always breaking my bones. I know just what to do. We shall ride at a walk to the tent, Andreas and I, motor home, and send for the vet. He'll come and tell me his favorite story, in hopes that I laugh and hurt myself. Don't be alarmed: I've never laughed at it yet."

He added, in a different voice:

"Besides, if you were so good as to go back with



us, they'd mention that, too, in the *Italie* to-morrow. Am I right, Andreas?"

"Absolutely. And after the *Italie*, the five-o'clocks. . . ."

She remembered she was in Rome. People would ask one another, with relish: "How did she get so far afield? Did she arrive with help, or go to fetch it? Which *tête-à-tête* did the accident interrupt?" By to-morrow night, a good many persons, who could not understand American girls at all, would have made the adventure more than romantic.

Still, she would probably have remained anyway—but she thought of Vincent. She knew perfectly the thinness of the ice which, in Latin society, an unmarried American girl had to cross to escape, at her betrothal, reminiscent gossip highly distasteful not only to her, but as well to her *fiancé*.

It was this that persuaded her to ride on alone.

But she had not gone a mile when something told her she might have done better to stay. She turned to look back.

At the foot of the bluff, horses and men appeared very small already. She made out Tito's tunic. He seemed to have mounted. Then the pink of Andreas' coat divided! One part remained still. The other crept out across the plain.

A moment ago, three men had been there together. Now one was following her. And she knew who this one must be. . . .

Her hunter bounded northward. It was a flight. From one summit, she saw, far ahead, scattered

points of scarlet and black. The nearer distance was covered with a net-work of fences. Abruptly, close at hand, on low ground, a hut appeared, ringed round by trees.

The hunt was still coursing away in the depths of a country cut up by obstacles. She could not hope to overtake it before being caught. But now, for the moment, the hillocks hid her pursuer from view. If she reached this hut unseen, before he emerged, perhaps he would pass straight on?

He had not come in sight again when she gained that shelter, rode round to the back, and slid from her saddle. But this was no sooner done than regretted.

She had obeyed the sort of impulse which drives one straight into the very dilemma one wants to avoid. Too late she knew that he would divine her trick—how transparent, now, how puerile, how unworthy of her pride! He would find her here. They would be alone in this waste.

Soon she heard hoof-beats approaching.

And, in order that her humiliation might not be complete, she pulled herself together, raised her chin, and walked out into the open.

He rode up, dismounted, and stood before her.

On all sides, for miles, extended that solitude, to dissolve at last, far off, in a mellow mist above which floated the white and violet-colored surfaces of the hills. The air was not stirred by any breeze. No sound came to them.

At last, he said:

"It was imprudent of you to run off like that. In these parts a lady never wanders about alone."

If this was duplicity, pride forced her to cap it with the falsehood:

"My horse picked up a stone. I expected to find some one here, to help me mount again."

"All the worse. A few of these peasants turn into extraordinary rascals without any notice."

"That never occurred to me. It was rather foolish, wasn't it? Especially as I don't speak Italian."

"You don't speak Italian?"

He regarded her thoughtfully. Then a look of amusement crossed his face. He demanded:

"Why are you always running away from me?"

"I? How absurd! Why should I?"

"Maybe some one's told you that I'm a sort of ogre. Yet you see I haven't tucked my napkin under my chin. I presume that ogres tuck napkins under their chins, before beginning their hideous repasts? I have a dim recollection of their doing it, in fairytales. It surprises you that I was once a small boy? I admit the absurdity of the thought. There were even people who patted me on the head! Though you'll hardly believe they did that twice. Your intuition tells you they must have discovered my horns."

"Now I know you're not in earnest."

"I'm perfectly in earnest. You dislike me so much that you can't bear the sight of me. Is it because I've let you see that you attract me tremendously?"

"If you please!" she said, quickly.

"You're wrong to take offence at that. You might as well blame me for being fascinated by the Vatican Venus. Or Watteau's 'Embarkment for Cythera.' Or the Shrine in Or San Michele. Or any other beautifully perfected thing. You shouldn't forbid me the happiness of admiring you any more than the Louvre ought to lock up its treasures when I come in sight. In your case, even less excuse. For one sometimes steals a Mona Lisa. But one doesn't get away so easily with a live young woman who has so strong an opinion of her own about it."

This unexpected tone made her recent thoughts seem almost hysterical. She was able to retort, with a fair imitation of his own manner:

"A very good thing, apparently, that I seem to show a—lack of sympathy."

"No doubt. Why not be frank about it? With the slightest encouragement, I might act in a perfectly outrageous manner."

He was looking at her with an intense, yet surreptitious, keenness. Abruptly, straightening herself, she said:

"Mr. Maure, need I tell you that I'm not accustomed to this sort of thing?"

"In the world we know best, one seldom encounters natural conduct. For instance, if I wish to express any inclination toward an unmarried girl, I have to begin by pretending that neither of us are human beings. But here, in the very heart of nature, one feels a certain impulse to be normal. . . ."

"May I ask you to put me on my horse?"

He became serious.

"Too bad! We might almost have understood each other to-day."

"I really don't see the necessity."

"The necessity remains, all the same. And who knows when we should find another such chance?"

She stared at him blankly. But, with a sudden gentleness that she had not thought him capable of, he explained:

"I mean, I want so much to alter your opinion of me."

He pointed to a rough bench, against the hut, by the open door.

"Come, sit down for a minute or two. It will do no harm for you to think of me a little more generously."

She felt that he had made open antagonism impossible for the moment. She did not believe that this new tone was sincere. Yet in decency she could hardly avoid responding to it. But she still temporized:

"It's all so superfluous!"

"Kindness will never seem amiss in you."

She sat down on one end of the bench. He seated himself on the other. Leaning back, and crossing his hands on his knee, he gazed out across the plain.

"It was in France, at the Montlhéry's garden-party, that I met you. Immediately, you disliked me. I'm used to that. But in your case, I couldn't bring myself to indifference. . . .

"I presume your first impression of me was affected by several things. To pass over my looks as charitably as possible, my reputation was hard against me, from your point of view. I might say one ought not to believe quite everything one hears. You'd probably reply that even gossip has more or less foundation. Besides, there are those books of mine. You've never read them, of course! But you've heard about them?

"Yes, I can understand how repugnant to you I must have been, that day. You're not like the general run. If I'm called one thing more than another, it's that I am 'perversely wicked.' That, in itself, would be quite enough for you.

"But let's run over some of the popular charges against me, viewed from that stand-point. . . .

"Not to bore you, there's the subject of religion. Usually, they harp on that. I don't see why. Nowadays, what men do you find, in good society, except the 'Blacks' in Rome and some of the English, who make any pretence at being Christians?

"What's to blame? One's early training? To be sure, at Lausanne, and Bonn, and Göttingen, I got a rather heavy dose of physics, biology, chemistry, higher mathematics, and so on. Religious faith is often difficult after scientific instruction. It isn't perversity that makes honest non-believers, but education.

"Still, as soon as I began to consider such matters, I felt as I do to-day. When I was young, good people tried to show me the evil of my ways. It seemed to

me that their arguments soon left the boundaries of logic. Or rather, that they soon ceased to argue at all, and fell back on simple assertion. Their final word always was, 'Such things are not proved, but felt.' I've never felt them: so I've never believed.

"I think that in a few years I shall be like the brown grass of this Campagna. Yesterday it was alive. To-day it's dead. No one pretends that a new spring is going to revive these blades. We know they'll live again merely through their descendants. Of all that dwells on earth, only mankind does man, in his vanity, flatter with promises of another life.

"So I believe that with death there'll be an end of me. Meanwhile, however, I shall have lived. And here we are at the point of personal conduct. . . .

"Do you remember what Emerson said about that? 'What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live from within? No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.' And he was right. To be an individual, one must live his own life.

"We don't all find our best satisfaction in the same way. Certain types get their greatest happiness in being ascetic. But those shouldn't expect all the rest of humanity to follow their lead. There are natures and natures. Saint Teresa would be wretched in Messalina's palace. Messalina would be no less miserable in a convent-cell.

"I confess I'm one of those who'd find only misery in asceticism. Or in slavery to an uncongenial public opinion.

"Do you realize that nothing enrages the world so

much as a man who worries along without its approval? What haven't they said about me—those good folks!

"One thing, they adore repeating that I drink too much. I drink a good deal, to be sure. But too much? A man only drinks too much if he drinks when he doesn't want to. I seldom do anything I don't want to.

"Then, too, they call me a shocking fellow in other ways. Here again my ideas are going to offend you. All the same, I hold them to be the truth. The truth that society still denies, with a sort of pathetic desperation, in the face of continual proof. To be satisfied with one for life is another ideal I can't believe in. . . ."

Ghirlaine's eyes remained fixed on his sombre face, intently, almost wonderingly. He fascinated her, as something abnormal fascinates—this man whose words blighted everything they touched. Immaculate in his "pink" and doeskin and glistening leather and white linen, he seemed to her the epitome of moral corruption. In the clear sunlight, all the deterioration of his features was emphasized. Only, for some strange reason, his hands seemed the hands of another person: large but exceedingly shapely, muscular but informed with a curious, almost insidious delicacy. It was when she looked at his hands that her heart beat faster, that she was afraid again—though of what she did not know. . . .

He was saying, with a half-humorous intonation:

"After all, where do I differ from half the men one



meets? Their opinions are much like mine. They keep them better hidden, that's all—or practise them less frankly. So they escape the abuse I receive. To be sure, condemnation will never mean anything to me. Unless you continue to share it."

He turned to her, and leaned forward. His face was changed. In it she saw, as it were, a hint of the charm of youth. It was as if the ghostly countenance of an ardent boy were showing, just for the moment, through that mask. In a lower voice he went on:

"I want you to put aside what others say, and judge me for yourself. You'll find that I'm merely a man like the rest, rather less hypocritical, or deluded, than most, but capable of a certain kind of idealism. The only satiable kind. . . .

"I'm very much in love with you. I feel this more deeply than I'd thought it possible to feel anything. I'm not fond of superlatives. But I know that you've stirred my life to its foundations. There's been nothing like this!

"Don't retort that my disillusionments are very different from your ideals. The ideal is for a lifetime—maybe even beyond. The disillusionment is only sure of the hour. Perhaps. But what an hour!"

His voice died in his throat. He wrapped his hands together. And, though he did not approach her by a hair's-breadth, once more she seemed to feel his passion sweep out, like a sheet of flame, and play round her.

But now she was not afraid. Her fear had left her in that moment when youth had peeped through the mask. She had recalled Sangallo's words, "That man's soul is dead. . . ." And there is no room in the heart for fear and pity together.

Looking him in the eyes, she answered, quietly:

"I'm sorry for you. I'm sorry for any one who is so far from God."

"But if God, after all, is only a creation of the imagination?"

"What is love but that?" she retorted, then bit her lip.

"Ah. I see you don't yet know love."

She felt her cheeks tingling. All her being was in revolt against this moment of intimacy, of revelation, that he, with surely a diabolical ingenuity, had driven her to. She stammered, by way of recovery:

"I should have told you at first that—I'm engaged to be married."

He seemed not to have heard this speech. Staring afield, he asked:

"Do you realize that for half an hour you've been here, alone, with a most corrupt and unscrupulous character, who'd give all the world for you? If you told that in Rome to-night! They'd never believe we hadn't played some very thrilling melodrama out here."

Standing up, he pointed across the Campagna.

"I see three riders coming back. Two men and a woman. Can you make them out?"

She discerned, on a far-off ridge, two specks of red

and one of black. They were not approaching, but moving slowly southward.

"I hardly think there's a good enough pair of eyes among them to see us under these trees. Now I'm going to put you on your horse. When you join them, you'd better not mention me. I suspect the black dot is Mme. Sémadéni. If so, you won't have to mention anything. She's a decent sort. The only woman of my acquaintance who knows how to hold her tongue in Rome."

He led the way round behind the hut. There he gave her a hand-up, fixed her foot in the stirrup, pulled down her apron-skirt. Stepping back, he said:

"Good-by."

"Good-by. And—thank you."

"It's I who owe the thanks."

She rode away.

He went back to the bench, sat down, and lighted a cigarette. Stretching out his long legs, he closed his eyes wearily. He was like a man relaxing from an abnormal strain of self-retention.

Soon, without opening his eyes, he uttered a sort of laugh:

"Not bad. . . ."

## CHAPTER VII

AFTER her encounter with Sebastian Maure in the Campagna, Ghirlaine Bellamy wondered at her past apprehensions. His confidences had not deceived her. She felt that his pretence of frankness concealed a depravity not to be put into words. Still, he no longer frightened her.

She had no doubt of the intensity, or the character, of his feelings toward her. Yet, in that lonely place, the notorious antagonist of restraint had failed to apply his theories in the slightest. She believed that his audacity, at least, was greatly overestimated. She had been alarmed by some one whose conduct, at the pinch, turned out to be very much like that of the rest of her world.

Her forebodings vanished. Things about her resumed their normal look. She recalled Mme. Sémadéni's "palmistry" with a smile. All these days, how absurdly hysterical she had been! How credulous! How unlike herself!

At the same time, she found herself at liberty to set out toward England. Her aunt was convalescent. The doctor prescribed a sea voyage. They decided to sail north, by the *Asiatic*, from Naples, in three days. Ghirlaine cabled to Vincent Pamfort that she would reach London within a fortnight.

She anticipated that meeting with a new fervor.

It was as if she had hardly appreciated her lover till now. But Sebastian Maure's proposal had arrayed those two personalities side by side with startling distinctness. At last she knew the full value of the man she had promised to marry.

How much he offered her! But she would know how to repay him. . . . One would have said that the flames of the unwelcome passion, playing round her, had, indeed, warmed her heart to unprecedented ardors—but for another.

She seemed already to see, as a setting for life-long happiness, the fair English countryside, and that homestead of a congenial race, full of honors. Ought she not to be happy?

"So I am," she said. "The happiest girl in the world."

She was sitting in her pale-blue *salon* at the Excelsior. Her maid had filled all the furniture with folded dresses, preparatory to packing them.

They were of silk, of satin, of lace, of gold and silver tissue, and covered with needlework that had cost untold hours of toil. They were not, perhaps, the attire of a European young girl, but of an American, one of those who to-day still astonish the Continent by being, in costume and manner, at once a *jeune fille* and a woman of the world. They formed the panoply of one who has to preserve for beauty that supreme respect only earned, in her native sphere, by its extravagant adornment. They represented a fortune sufficient to have kept many a household in comfort for years.

From those shimmering heaps, it was difficult to choose the gowns she wanted to wear, the two days that remained to her in Rome.

This afternoon, she was going to a tea at Mme. de Chaumont's. There she would have to tell every one she was departing. Sebastian Maure, on hearing this news, would try to see her again?

After all, if he succeeded, what harm? In three days, she would leave him behind forever! She did not think of him again till she was at Mme. de Chaumont's.

In the long suite of reception-rooms, all the windows were screened against the sunshine. Shaded lamps diffused a glow that left the cornices in shadow. Round the tea-tables, the radiance was most intense, as if issuing from the masses of chased silver and crystal, crowned with roses.

The conversation was deafening. One hardly heard the string-band, as it played the latest languorous waltz. The hot air, drugged with many perfumes and the odors of flowers, furs, and food, pulsed from the din. Through a sort of reddish mist appeared countless powdered faces, the intermingling plumes of extraordinary hats, necks decked with jewels, figures constricted in rich-colored silks, that slipped round one another with serpentine dexterity. Here and there, a man's bare head was raised, an eyeglass flashed, an uptwirled mustache disappeared behind a tea-cup.

Mme. de Chaumont, in purple satin, her corsage ornamented with diamonds, looked almost handsome

as she received the swarm. A sweet smile kept returning to her lips. If she detested society, no one would have supposed it from her demeanor. This *spirituelle*, slim creature, who was credited with a longing to enter the Sacré Cœur, appeared to-day a woman of the Parisian great world.

Ghirlaine saw, above the fluttering hats, the blackish, solemn ugliness of Don Giulio Brazzazza. And she was not in time to check the thought, "Possibly so good an actress may have other rôles?"

The next instant, she asked herself: "Good Heavens, shall I end by having a mind like half the rest? Is all this affecting me, too, at last?"

And suddenly the air of that place, sweet, lax, and vitiated, seemed laden with an insidious poison.

How long she had breathed its like!

Beside her, spread over a chair, the Marchesa of Portagialla leaned on her canes. She looked like an obese, bewhiskered old idol. Her little black eyes glittered behind their rolls of fat.

"Eh, my dear, and whose heart are you going to break to-day?"

In fact, all the men in the room were staring at Ghirlaine. She wore a costume of peacock-blue, embroidered over the bust with dull gold. At her neck was a brooch of sapphires that matched the hue of her eyes, these shadowed by the wide brim of her hat laden with peacock-blue willow-plumes.

Smiling, she answered the old Marchesa:

"But aren't hearts rather hard to break, after all?"

"*Dio mio!* At your age I'd seen at least one at-

tempt at suicide, not to mention the duels. What's the world coming to? There seem to be very few really ardent temperaments left! In the Rome of the Cæsars, a girl was married at thirteen more often than not. I hear that in your country, to-day, half of them put it off till they're thirty. A few years more, and I wonder how the human race is going to continue legitimately!"

Sangallo appeared beside them.

"I'm about to run away with Miss Bellamy, if you'll let me? Donna Letizia's looking for her."

"Very well, young man. Though in my time, thank God, that wasn't how one ran away with a beauty. . . ."

As they made through the crowd, the novelist remarked:

"I hear you're leaving."

"Day after to-morrow."

"I'm going to miss you. Some time, when I voyage to England, you'll let me call on you both?"

She had a shock of surprise. Her engagement was known!

"How did you find that out?"

"You could never guess. Fancy—an accidental word let fall by a peasant-girl!"

And, without removing his gaze from her face, he related the talk in Brian Dungannan's studio.

"But I'm sure your secret's still safe—even in Rome! There were only the four of us. And Maure, whatever his faults may be, isn't a gossip."

After a moment's thought, she demanded:



"When was all this?"

"The day before the last Meeting."

So Sebastian Maure had known it when he met her in the Campagna!

"Where is Donna Letizia," she inquired, in a rather breathless voice.

They found her with Mme. Sémadéni.

But Princess Campobasso came hurrying through the crush. Dressed in smoky-red silk, she wore round her white throat a necklet of rubies. Approaching Ghirlaine, she cried:

"It's not true you're deserting us!"

"The doctor wants Aunt Charlotte to take a sea voyage——"

"So you must sacrifice yourself! Really, you know, this self-sacrifice thing can be run in the ground. If Sangallo will stop his ears, I've been strengthening that opinion of late by reading——"

"Sebastian Maure?" drawled Mme. Sémadéni.

"Sebastian Maure indeed! Nietzsche, my dear! The apostle of Dionysian happiness."

"Nietzsche," repeated Don Leone Torquato, lounging up, very pale and tired-looking. "Ah, yes. The chap who died insane. Why is it that the apostles of happiness are apt to die so uncomfortably? And, often, so early?"

He interrupted himself with a fit of coughing.

Donna Letizia Torquato made a quick gesture. But at once she resumed her habitual look, half proud and half sad.

Ghirlaine glanced from mother to son. She re-

called the tales she had heard about this boy. As if the inheritance of his father's degenerate line were not enough, he persisted, with a sort of fatal madness, in debauchery that was killing him even before his time.

"But do you admire Nietzsche, Don Leone?"

"I confess I find Sebastian Maure's philosophy more satisfying. You see, in some ways it goes farther. Then, too, it's dressed in fiction: consequently its appeal is wider. Besides, it's much easier to read. Maure's style is remarkably lucid. His sentences would charm a child or an artist. How about that, Ernesto?"

Sangallo assented:

"A style fit to be the medium of a great propaganda."

Hector de Chaumont's fan-shaped beard joined the circle. And the Frenchman, in his shallow, lyrical voice, protested at once:

"Propaganda! My dear fellow! Art ceases to be art, when it starts to preach. Literature, to go on existing, has got to keep out of the pulpit."

"If Voltaire, for instance, had held that opinion, the eighteenth century would hardly have seen a French Revolution, or the birth of liberty, equality, and fraternity."

"La, la! Merely words, even to-day. A mirage in the minds of idealists."

"It's by constantly reaffirming ideals that we finally turn them to practice."

"I think," said Don Leone, "ideals are a frightful

bore. Indeed, I agree with Maure that they're quite absurd."

Sangallo's eyes met Ghirlaine's. She recalled his words in the Borghese Gardens, "It isn't the strong alone who read, but also the weak. And weakness is always susceptible to disease. . . ."

And she saw, in this sickly youth before her, driven on toward his fate by his inability to resist evil influence, the personification of all Maure's victims. This one epitomized all the morally crippled, the inefficient of conscience, the feeble in need of strength, whose pitiable perversity had brought them in sympathy with that arch-perversity, to their greater prostration. And at this moment she hated Sebastian Maure as never before.

Her face must have spoken thus to Sangallo. For his brows contracted. He shook his head. He seemed to be telling her, "Now you are going too fast. . . ."

But Leone was relating some scandal to Hector de Chaumont. Fiammetta Innocenti and Andreas Romanovitch had parted "forever." He knew this for a fact. He had passed her hotel just as the Russian dashed out on the sidewalk, beside himself, a spectacle for the passers-by.

"Bah!" de Chaumont commented, shrugging his shoulders. "With those two, it's always like that."

"I think not. He jumped into my cab. While I was taking him home, he renounced her formally. She's made a mistake this time. She's plagued him once too often. And all the thousands——"

"In fact," de Chaumont assented, "he has been hard up of late."

Mme. Sémadéni did not hesitate to join this discussion:

"If Andreas Romanovitch pretends he's hard up, on that account or any other, it's merely another pose. The Tchernaiëff family is enormously rich. Half the independent oil-fields round Baku are in their hands. I suppose this one thinks that poverty is *chic*. Just so, he pretends he's depraved, when he's naturally religious. But *mon Dieu!* What would life be like, without its grotesques!"

Her slavonic pessimism appeared. She looked round her, sombre-eyed, as if disenchanted with everything.

"This Innocenti began in the gutter, I hear," said Donna Letizia. Her famous charity could not extend to that "creature," whom her son quite frankly admired. But de Chaumont, thoughtfully stroking his beard, asked Leone:

"When did this business happen?"

"While I was on my way here."

"*Tiens. . .*"

And, as soon as the conversation had changed, he vanished.

Leone, on missing him, at once guessed the truth. He glanced toward Mme. de Chaumont, who was still receiving industriously. Then, with a snicker, in English:

"Rather schokking, what?"

Ghirlaine made as if to pass on to another group. But Princess Betty detained her.

"Not till you've promised to spend to-morrow with me. Besides, you must tell me how Tito met with his accident. Over the telephone, he does nothing but make silly jokes about it."

"Does Tito make jokes now?" Leone inquired, with malicious interest. "*Diamine*, it's wonderful! He's certainly getting on."

And, since no one looked at him askance, he ventured to add:

"See the miracles it effects!"

"That what effects?" Princess Betty demanded.

"Why, Roman civilization!"

Sangallo was telling Ghirlaine of a visit he had received from John Elzevir, the old recluse who lived out toward Tivoli. But she heard Princess Campobasso say:

"Mme. Sémadéni, you know the Caucasus——"

"I was born there."

"Then perhaps you can give us the facts of that story about Sebastian Maure. You've heard it?"

"Who hasn't?" responded the Russian, smiling languidly.

"Is it true he abducted the girl from the convent?"

"Some one did. At the time, I was in Bulgaria."

"But you know all the thrilling details?"

"Thrilling? But really, in the Caucasus abductions aren't so rare. Besides, this young woman wasn't to take the veil. Her parents had merely put her away because she seemed skittish. Her *fiancé* didn't please her, I understand. Just before the wedding-day, she managed to run off with the stranger.

Perhaps he'd promised to show her Paris! When one is young, it's astonishing what trifling fancies decide the future."

"But you're spoiling all the romance! At least, don't tell me they weren't pursued."

"Oh, as much as you wish of that. Mountain gorges; sun on snow; bullets splashing against the rocks. The crack of rifles, and figures rolling down distant hillsides like little brown boulders. Sore feet; aching limbs; dirty faces swathed in bandages, above empty bandoliers. He started, I think, with a dozen men, and ended with three. A *festa* for vultures, that elopement!"

"How wonderfully you tell it!"

"I know the country."

"And what became of her?"

"Who can say? Perhaps they were married, she and that Whoever-he-was. Indeed, why not? One ought to give every one the benefit of the doubt, till the contrary's proved. Am I right, Signore Sangallo?"

"Certainly."

"How incredible it all seems," said Donna Letizia, looking round as if waking out of a dream.

"It's a question of locality. The atmosphere of different places impels different sorts of conduct. In the Caucasus, such things often take a violent turn. Here, they remain surreptitious. One is always influenced, more or less, by environment. What's extravagant in Rome becomes conventional in the wilds."

But Princess Betty, gazing into space, exclaimed: "All the same, that's the essence of romance! Hardship, peril, the fear of death, for the sake of passion! How much we miss of emotion, we *civilisés*! To be seized, to be carried away, in a hail of bullets, from the monotone of ordered life, by some man who is really strong——"

Stopping short, she recovered herself with a laugh.

"After all, one would miss the luxuries!"

"And possibly the necessities," Mme. Sémadéni assented. "Where does one smoke in this house?"

"Follow me. I know all the corners—unless they're filled with flirts. Come along, Ghirlaine, and tell us about poor Tito."

But she bade them good-by.

She felt that she could no longer breathe in that rose-colored place. The flowers were drooping. The air had taken on a sickening sweetness. And this aroma seemed derived less from the mingled scents of all those elegant toilettes than from a subtle, yet pervading carnality.

She told herself she was overwrought. The mental attitude of a few ought not to make her unjust to the rest. But it was as if, in these close-screened rooms, misty with jewels, rich fabrics, and painted lips, there was spreading to every heart a contagion of cynicism, duplicity, and spiritual decay.

Again there rose before her a vision of noble trees against cold skies, far removed from the corruption of ancient cities. . . .

She gained the vestibule. But Sangallo appeared

beside her, helped her into her fur coat, and called for her motor-car. Then, taking her hand, he said, with his gentle smile:

"I sha'n't see you again. I prefer to remember you as you seem to me at this moment. Even though you're only half right. Even though you're setting out rather blindly, in consequence. But blindly or not, I feel that you'll find what you're hunting for. You have the look of one to whom the truth, and all its mysterious rewards, must be revealed."

He paused. Amid that hurly-burly, his face grew vacant in speculation.

"I want you to know that I'm always at your service. At the service of your happiness and your welfare. That's not one of those phrases of courtesy, which mean nothing, because they're not likely to lead to anything. Some day, I may be able to help you toward something that you desire? . .

"So," he concluded, rousing himself, "you may count on me, as we romancers are often tempted to write, 'till the death.'"

His smile returned. But there was a hint of moisture in his eyes. She responded, in tones that were slightly unsteady:

"I'm very proud to think you let me count on you so. There's no one I'd rather have for a friend."

"We have been *simpatica*, haven't we? Well, well—good luck, and all the happiness in the world."

"And for you, success in all the fine work you have in mind. Even though, as I understand, you'd do away with the churches!"



"I wouldn't do away with them. I'd increase them. I'd have one built in every heart. . . . Not good-by! We'll meet again, one of these days. *A rivederla.*"

*"A rivederla—amico mio."*

"You've learned my language at last!"

"Only those words, I think. They were an inspiration."

"They're enough."

He kissed her hand. She entered the motor-car, and departed.

She let down all the windows of the limousine, and told the chauffeur to drive fast, at random. The automobile rushed forward into the evening fog.

Lights were springing up. Vehicles were blotted against the bright shop-windows. Palaces towered into the mist, gaunt ruins emerged, mediæval façades aglitter with gold mosaics, splotched walls hung with ragged linen, the cypresses of some princely garden, rising above a gate set with broken statues.

The air was thick with the exhalation of all these old and crumbling things. From the mouths of alleyways, in the stagnant depths of which the very odors of dead centuries seemed embalmed, there issued a pestilential, dispiriting breath. Was not this ground, so often soaked with blood and tears, yielding up its indisinfectable miasma?

Her instinct was that of a nation still young, full of vigor, impatient of the old. She perceived in these surroundings the essential poison of progress. She realized the impossibility of health in the midst of so much that was dead.

To sweep away the old, to purify the spot where so

long it had lain decaying! Or, if that was not possible, to escape, as if from a plague!

True life lay far away! . . .

But the walls enveloped her, black, luminous with the sweat of an enfeebled antiquity. She saw the portico of a humble church. The quilt swung back from the door. In the light of the lantern, Andreas Romanovitch came forth. His eyes were swollen from weeping. He went away dragging his feet. She shrank back in the limousine.

"Home!"

The automobile left the alleys, flashed across *piazas*, plunged into the Corso.

The fashionable hour had not yet ended. The narrow sidewalks were crowded. The roadway was blocked by traffic. Motor-radiators adorned with brass images of Saint Christopher, silver harness, crested doors, furs, orchids, women's white faces, moved past in the light that gushed out of show windows, above the busbies and helmets of sauntering officers. In an old-fashioned victoria, beside an elderly woman-companion, sat little Donna Dora, pale midst her sables, wide-eyed, ingenuous, child-like. To Ghirlaine she resembled a lily passing unharmed through the heat of a furnace.

"I'm not myself! . . ."

She reached the hotel. In her apartment she found a letter from Lady Glastenwold:

*Lemster died to-day. I'm off for England. I tried to find you and say good-by. But your aunt says you're following—.*

The letter dropped from her hand. Depression invaded her.

This death, which had been the price of the full measure of her happiness, brought her only remorse. How heartless, now, all those dreams she had woven!

She remembered the girl in England, whom Vincent had once "thought he loved," who doubtless loved him still.

What could one hope for, from a future built on such things? A man's life, and the tears of a woman! Bad omens. . . .

She looked out into the mist.

"But I have my own needs, of heart and soul!"

Yet the air seemed heavier still, as if with an immeasurable reproach.

## CHAPTER VIII

IF Sebastian Maure had glanced over the *Italie* next morning, or the number of the *Carnet Mondain* which appeared the day after, he would have read that Ghirlaine was leaving Rome. If, during those two days, he had entered the Chess Club, the Skating Club, the winter garden of the Excelsior, a little sooner or later, he might have heard this news repeated. Tito, whom he found in bed in a plaster jacket, talked of nothing but aëroplanes, the new French uniforms, and a Spanish dancer at the Salone Margherita, whose impudent performances he was going to miss. Even Andreas Romanovitch could not enlighten him. For Andreas, according to his valet, had vanished from town for "a promenade in the country."

Moreover, such tattle was hardly to have been expected in the gloomy palace where, finally, Sebastian went to call on Prince Torquato.

This aged eccentric had a rugged bald head, a hooked nose, and a yellow, arrogant visage out of which peered, with a sort of dim fierceness, the eyes of a dying eagle. He believed implicitly that his house was descended from the Roman Torquatus who had slain a barbarian king in the Gaulish invasion. Long contemplation of this unique grandeur had brought him to look on himself as the last

ancient—the sole surviving spirit of the dead past.

It was one of his delusions that he was the logical heir to all the relics of those first shadowy ancestors of his race. Sometimes, at night, he hobbled out to brood over the Forum, which he permitted “these moderns” to meddle with, but which really belonged to him alone. There were even those who said that in some recess of his palace rose the last pagan altar. There a thin flame still burned to Mars, while the silence that fell from those vast walls was broken now and then by prayers in the primitive dialect of the Salii.

But if he was intolerant of the religion which had supplanted that one, he felt, at least, no intolerance toward the irreligion of Sebastian Maure. In the latter, he seemed to discern the fierce appetency and ruthlessness that had shaped the splendor of ancient Rome. He felt for this foreigner, in consequence, a singular sympathy.

Now, however, the old Prince had evidently begun to crumble in earnest. At first, he could not remember his visitor. Then, at mention of Leone’s name, he maintained a blank face, while murmuring:

“You know, my friend, I have little acquaintance among these upstarts who infest our city to-day.”

“But I’m talking about your grandson,” Sebastian explained.

“Ah, my grandson!” A look of dull suffering appeared on his face, as he sighed:

“Do you know you happen to live in an extraordinary age? You shall see the end of Us. . . .”

They were sitting in an immense room of unusual height, cold, damp, and dim, for all the sunshine blazing out of doors beyond the bolted shutters. The floor was paved in concentric patterns with red and yellow tiles worn glossy by many generations of the Torquati. The walls were covered with rotted leather, painted and gilded in designs of mediæval naïveté. The shadowy ceiling showed intersecting beams, thickly carved with shields, whereon glimmered the arms of related families long since extinct.

Indeed, this grim old palace still maintained the quaint, uncomfortable grandeur of its youth, when torches blazed about its gates, when casements were often marks for cross-bow bolts, when swords went to work on its winding stairways, and trap-doors yawned suddenly, to send hated visitors tumbling into an *oubliette* full of bones and rusty armor. To-day, this old Prince, tilting the window-shutters, could look out into the street as if upon a different world.

Now, his face full of animosity, he peered down, through the wooden slats, at the passers-by. The words escaped him:

“What degenerates!”

He motioned Sebastian to join him at the window.

“*Per Bacco!* Those women in their carriages! Their high heels! Their corsets! Their ridiculous hats! Their feet crippled by their stilted shoes! Their teeth ruined by sugar and soft food! Their indolent bodies feebler than a child’s! All their vital organs squeezed into a half-lifeless mass! But if the Venus of Milo were to appear before them in the flesh,

how they'd laugh at her! Yet they're the responsible ones—those dolls, who give birth to the hereditary masters of all this degenerate humanity!”

Sebastian, who was able to see both sides of at least a good many questions, thought this apportionment of responsibility a trifle unfair.

He responded, with a short laugh:

“I suppose it's my famous perversity that sympathizes with all this twentieth-century artificiality? As a matter of fact, do you think that men who had grown accustomed to the *allure* of this type would ever be content to return to the other?”

“I am not thinking of one's personal satisfaction, but of one's descendants.”

“Ah, one's descendants!”

“And you? Do you never think of those who may follow you?”

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

“I fancy I rather lack the paternal instinct. I'm not much on children. . . .” He added, his dark skin slightly flushing, “Perhaps I should say that children aren't much for me. . . .”

But Prince Torquato was not listening. Presently, taking Sebastian by the arm, he said, in a tremulous voice:

“Do you know, sometimes, at night, I have a curious dream. I seem to be standing on the Palatine Hill. Rome lies before me in the moonlight. But all is changing, in a mist of altering outlines. These hideous modern buildings dissolve. Turrets and battlements take their places. The battlements give place to ruins, the ruins to great glistening temples

and porticos. Then those forests of columns melt into humbler structures, of freestone, roughly chiselled, and these to huts. And I'm looking down on the beginnings of my city.

"And I see another race of women. Strong bodies, supple, agile, buoyant, shining with health! Under loose garments, firm torsos, that support themselves with beautiful muscles! Straight backs, massive limbs, broad hips ready for their natural burdens! Firm, flat feet, with toes as individual as fingers, that grip the earth as if they loved it! . . . And the high head of the water-carriers! The long stride! The vigorous, undulating grace of bodies that know labor! The innocent, casual nudity of an age that was not ashamed of nakedness, because its nakedness was not degenerate! . . .

"So I seem to see the women of Romulus's Rome. The mothers of her vigor, whom we stole, that day, from the Sabines. Whom we stole because we needed them. Because we wanted them. Because our natures knew nothing of pity, or foreign opinion, or fear, when these things were balanced against our desires. Because we were men indeed, the Children of the Wolf, predatory, ruthless, invincible, as man was meant to be. . . .

"But time crumbles everything. . . ."

He returned to his chair, and sat down feebly. And, while his dim gaze roved round the cornices, he concluded, in husky tones:

"Rome is finished! It's the last pulse-beat of the old that's dying!"



Was it not true?

Outside the tall windows, the modern world was racketting—tram-car bells, motor-horns, the cries of news-venders, and, from the suburbs, faintly, factory whistles. Those sounds invaded the silence of this cold dismal place, where all was immobility and age. They had the insistence of an imperious warning.

They stood for activity of thought, for labor with aspiration, for a new order of life, a new programme of human progress. Beginning far off, in lands teeming with vigor and spiritual enfranchisement, they had sent their echoes even thus far. They sounded about the Seven Hills, round the ruins of despots' palaces, round basilicas that had been the temples of pagan gods, round the houses of a nobility still deaf to the note of universal brotherhood in that din, round hovels of the poor who were too deep in the mire to realize, yet, that such sounds were meant also for them. Even to Rome, so long the heart of the world's rapacity and injustice, so long the field of ruins, languor, stagnation, came that clamor of a humanity struggling into a union of science and brotherhood. It penetrated this room, where these two sat listening.

But while one, with a heavy gesture, acquiesced to defeat, the other, squaring his shoulders, defied anew that spirit so inimical to all his instincts and convictions. And presently it seemed to him that all the world's enmity and opposition were personified in her. . . .

Yet that was the woman he desired, despite her

purity, her idealism, her clear gaze raised to the Beyond, informed with the certainty of imperishable things! And all the obstacles that rose between them only intensified his determination.

Still, passion was not going to tempt him into rashness. He knew when subtlety was better than violence. There are few repulsions that time cannot abate, if time is aided by ingenious persuasion.

He counted on at least a month more with her in Rome. He believed he could afford to go slowly.

Thus, on the morning when she set out for Naples, chance impelled him to spend the day in the saddle, outside the walls.

He rode eastward across the brown plain marked here and there with crumbling mediæval towers, and broken arches of ancient aqueducts. Perhaps, from a hilltop, he saw the train that was bearing her away. But the mountains called him on, their warm slopes, rising above a dull-green haze of olive-groves, set with tiny sun-bright villages.

He had nearly reached Tivoli, when the heat apprised him that it was time to rest his horse and lunch. Some distance off, on a hillside, a modest farm appeared, sheltered midst orange-groves. A flower-garden blazed round a rustic pergola. Beehives clustered beyond. Thither he turned, expecting a peasant's welcome. But beneath the trees he came on an old, frail foreigner, with white beard, translucent skin, and deep-set eyes that looked forth in profound benignity. Sebastian drew rein.

"Pardon me for this intrusion. I've evidently made a mistake."

"How so?" the old man asked him, smiling. "You were hunting for rest and food, were you not, Mr. Maure?"

"It appears, sir, that I have met you somewhere."

"I saw you at Princess Campobasso's ball," the other responded. Apparently he was not conscious of the incongruity of that speech, as it issued from the lips of an old fellow whose clothes were threadbare and earthy, who stood before a home so small, so humble, and so still.

"I am John Elzevir," he added.

"The fact that I'm a trespasser——"

"This house belongs to you as much as it does to me."

"Oh? I presumed you lived here."

"As far as that goes, so I do. . . . Shall we see to your horse? For yourself, I don't say a *filet de sole Mornay*, a *poulet sauté Grand Duc*, or a bottle of Romanée Conti 1856. After all, hunger is still the best sauce."

Sebastian dismounted.

"Undoubtedly!" he said, with a laugh. "There was once a day when I found rare dog a surprising delicacy. Another when I began to broil a lizard with the gayest anticipations. But the light of the fire brought me a soft-nosed bullet, and I had to give up. Cooked lizard, perhaps. But raw? One must draw the line somewhere."

John Elzevir regarded him thoughtfully.

"You have had your glimpses of life, my friend."

"I've gone in search of them," Sebastian replied, with a shrug. "But you, too, it seems to me?"

"We all stumble through the rudiments of education," the old man said and led the way to the house.

They lunched in the kitchen, on cheese, gray bread, and a flask of Orvieto, which the host did not touch. At that repast, a peasant farm-hand kept them company, gaunt, swarthy, his bare arms knotted like olive-branches, silent, voracious. Occasionally, his large eyes, which seemed a trifle clouded and wild, turned to John Elzevir in dog-like devotion.

The latter explained in English:

"Ten years ago he killed his master, who had treated him badly. While he was lying in prison, his children died of cholera, and his wife ran away with another man. When he came out, he was all for being a brigand. We had many long talks on that subject."

"And when do you expect the *vendetta*?"

John Elzevir, turning to the Italian, said:

"Our friend wants to know how soon you're going to kill Jacopo and Mimmi?"

The farm-hand stared solemnly at Sebastian.

"Signore, I'm not ashamed any more to let them live. When I go to the village, the boys make fun of me. They offer to lend me a knife. But I tell them *Domeneddio* prefers to attend to those two Himself, after they've learned the little lesson He's set them. For me to interrupt it would be discourteous to Him. Is it not so?"

"*Sicuro*—surely," John Elzevir remarked.

"Eh, so I say, because you've instructed me. But the boys in the village think I'm mad."

"They haven't yet learned their own little lesson," the old man said.

"They say I am mad through living here."

"You'll be madder still before we're through."

"Eh, by God's help," the man assented, with the grave smile of a child.

John Elzevir looked at Sebastian thoughtfully. At last, he mused:

"The poor are wonderful, aren't they? . . . Perhaps you're not well acquainted with them? So many aren't. One misses so much that way. They have such a lot to tell. There are countless marvellous things that only the poor can tell us. Has it really never seemed so to you?"

"Never."

"Ah. Will you have more wine? Then let's go out and see the bees."

Sebastian lighted a cigar. They walked down into the garden.

Roses were everywhere, red, pink, white, yellow, orange-colored. Beside the path, they gathered in great masses, to climb the tree-trunks, and to load all the branches with their gorgeousness. The soft air was redolent of their breath. And through that perfumed silence, from box-hives each painted with its own heraldic-looking designs and colors, the bees came humming, to assist, in their ceaseless industry, at the procreation of all that beauty.

How still, how pure, how lovely, this retreat! Sebastian thought of Brian Dungannan's words, "Have you never dreamed of going away, hand in

hand with some one, into the woods forever? Everything is there. . . .”

But beyond the tops of the olive-trees that filled the slope, the plain rolled out its empty leagues, in sunny ambiguity, toward Rome. And on the horizon, trembling as if between earth and heaven, appeared a long mist of roofs, and, above, one dome of almost imperceptible blue.

John Elzevir said:

“Do you know those words of Vassari’s, ‘I experienced how much more profitable is sweet quiet than the clamor of the *piazza* and the court.’ Off there, how different, eh?”

“The great cities are what they have always been.”

“And it’s in the city, in what the city finally produces, that the downfall of nations has invariably begun. Still, we must always have great cities. Perhaps their salvation lies in the new spirit dawning over them?”

“What spirit is that?”

“Of brotherhood. Of the united labor of the many for the whole.”

“The dream of Socialism—universal mediocrity?”

“No. Universal normality.”

“Is slavery normal? What is despotism, if not the confinement of the individual?”

“But, my friend, the weak must be protected.”

“Nature says otherwise.”

“Then you would have men live only to gratify their old appetite for mastery?”

"If they did, they would be natural again."

"And what of charity, gentleness, self-sacrifice, that humanity has learned through so much travail?"

"Those things have brought nothing but weakness."

The old recluse slowly shook his head, then gazed at the other with kindly curiosity.

"You aren't a bit religious?"

"I've seen the ruins of Babylon, and Thebes, and Carthage, and Athens, and Rome."

"But the religion of to-day is hardly comparable with the rest."

"It's the same in this—it's built on assertions that can never be proved by science or logic."

"It's built on the satisfaction that nothing but its teachings can give the soul."

"Oh, if we're going to discuss the soul," Sebastian laughed, "I must leave the rest to you!"

The silence was threaded by the hum of passing bees. John Elzevir said:

"Indeed, I'm discourteous to wrangle with my guest."

"On the contrary, I'm the discourteous one. For I see my ideas pain you."

"Yes; I admit that. They strike one like a cold wind, and chill the heart. My son, you are missing so much!"

"What a man has never known he has never missed."

"There I think you are out."

And, after a while:

"Let us sit down under the trees. I'll tell you a story."

They seated themselves upon a bench, in the shade of massed orange-leaves and roses. While the bees buzzed round them the old man said:

"As a boy, I was a mixture of spirituality and earthliness—a youth like any other; or almost any other. I was rich, my own master, with all the world before me. And I plunged into the world, into its crowded, splendid places. I was drawn toward that great conflagration which hangs over the capitals of nations as naturally as a moth is drawn toward a lamp. Youth is so fearless, so sure of itself, and of the future! I didn't know that I was one of the weak, whom you would wipe out, to give more room to those you call the strong. . . .

"No one told me what was bound to follow. I had everything to learn for myself. I learned through much suffering. Through repugnance, remorse, and fear of God's vengeance, which I still expected was destined to take place somewhere in the remote future—though it was going on even then.

"But there were two natures in me still, as there are in most all of humanity, clear to the end. So I couldn't escape from one life into the other. Earth was always drawing me back from heaven.

"I didn't know that God doesn't expect men to be too good. That He doesn't need an act of complete renunciation to be pleased. That He's satisfied just by the intention of to-day, even though He knows it's going to be broken to-morrow.



"I wanted to escape to Him completely. Because I was too weak to do so, I suffered terribly. I saw, at last, that I couldn't free myself. And I fell to wondering what influence outside myself could free me?

"In mankind, even while we're striving to climb upward, there clings to us an ineradicable materialism. . . . So I dreamed of a woman, of such mingled spirituality and physical beauty that, through her, I might effect a compromise, that would be pleasing to Nature, and so to God.

"But I never found her. Many others I found, in many places—but not that one. So there is something that one man has never known, and yet has missed! . . .

"Has she existed? I've seen her come to others. I've learned that my longing for her must have been the true inspiration. It wasn't cowardice to desire such a compromise. For it is not only folly, but even wrong, to try to deprive life of its material part, in order to give more play to the spiritual.

"In fact, I've perceived lives round me come to their fulness only by such means. Man's but half of himself. Woman's the other half. That is Nature. And through the labyrinths of chance, amid the chaos of momentary passions and sordid disillusionments, man is always groping for that other half of himself—sometimes searching, though he may not know it, in the very mire of debauchery, for the inestimable jewel. . . . That jewel many never find. But others find it. And in their hands it becomes a talisman,

to unlock all the questions we need to have answered in this life. . . .

"When one doesn't find the real thing, one gets along with makeshifts. And, finally, I who couldn't find peace on the bosom of that other part of me, was drawn into the bosom of Nature, that great maternal force, of infinite tenderness, which would cure us of so many miseries if we'd only let her.

"I sought solitude. And here I am.

"Of course, it was an admission of defeat. I'd been beaten on that swarming battle-field. I'd drawn off with little honor. I still envy those strong enough to find their victory there. But we can't all be strong. . . . And indeed, I hardly had the strength even to escape, till age began to dull the brilliancy of temptation. Many saints are made like that: but few are ready to confess it.

"For years I'd seen all the cities of the world, and the glory of them. I'd searched them from top to bottom—from the halls hung with riches to the ignoble corners that are ashamed of sunlight. Possibly, when I turned away at last, I hoped that she might rise up from amid the flowers? But even here she didn't come to me. And now I'm old.

"Elsewhere? In another youth? I think so. For everything must find its complement in the end. So I'm waiting. And it may be that I'm not yet fit to meet her. So, while waiting, I'm preparing myself for that event.

"Here I'm learning lessons that I could never have learned off there, in the stridence and confusion which sets that horizon quivering. Day and night,

there rises out of this unpolluted earth an ineffable perfume of wisdom. Amid so much mute and subtle progress, the heart must flower, too.

"I'm still very ignorant, however. The older I grow, the more I glimpse that I shall never see well enough to impart to others. But every day I set down what's been revealed to me—not through science, not through logic, but through the voice of Eternity, as it speaks to me, in the silence, by the lips of flowers, the songs of insects, and the stir of that life beneath the sod which is never discouraged, never weary of effort toward the sun. . . ."

In the end, he said:

"It's a strange thing for me to talk this way. But somehow I was impelled to do so. . . . Will you come and see how my old-fashioned blooms are getting on? . . ."

It was late that afternoon when Sebastian entered Rome. . . .

As he passed the Acqua Felice, some one hailed him. He saw, in a taxicab, Ernesto Sangallo. Valises were piled up round him. Apparently, he was bound for the railroad station. The taxicab halted. Sebastian rode up to it, with the words:

"Leaving town?"

"For my little place in Piedmont. I seem to be going stale down here. It's time for a sniff of the country."

"Sorry to lose you."

"Thanks. It's just occurred to me that I may not be back before you leave yourself——"

"Oh, I shall hardly go for a month or two."

Sangallo's clear eyes examined the other's countenance thoughtfully.

"Who knows? We all change our minds—sometimes at the shortest notice. Still, I want to leave you my card. If there's anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to command me."

"You're more than kind," said Sebastian, storing the bit of bristol away in his pocket-book like a man who has just received something valuable.

"Nothing! So good-by."

"*Au revoir* would be more propitious."

"You're right. Besides, we shall certainly meet again, before very long."

Once more he looked at Sebastian carefully, before motioning to the chauffeur to proceed.

"Good luck!"

"Good luck!"

Sebastian rode on to the Grand Hotel.

In the lobby, he met Prince Campobasso. The latter was bound for the rooms of the Jockey Club, in the same building. When Sebastian invited him into the bar, he suggested the club apartments instead.

They entered a room illuminated by table-lamps, dull-green, cream-colored pillars here and there, the walls covered with old prints of famous race-horses. Sitting down, they ordered whiskey-and-sodas.

Prince Campobasso was rather more self-contained, more English, than usual. His fair, handsome face, however, was Latin enough to show that beneath the mask lurked some unpleasant thoughts.

Sebastian wondered idly if, by any chance, he could have heard part of the last week's tea-table gossip concerning Princess Betty and Tito. For Rome, always Argus-eyed, and furnished, like *Fama*, with a thousand tongues, had decided that Princess Campobasso's long-awaited *liaison* was practically begun.

But, from behind a sofa, rose a pair of melancholy red eyes, which regarded them with lack-lustre blankness. It was Andreas Romanovitch.

Sebastian grinned at him.

"I thought you were in the country."

"I was. But the country is worse than the city. The country doesn't make one forget oneself. *Bigre!* On the contrary!"

"Come out from behind that sofa. Stop giving that horrid imitation of the head on the charger."

Andreas picked himself up, advanced, and flopped down in a neighboring chair. As if to defy his state of mind, he wore a greenish tweed suit, tan shoes with toothpick toes, a cravat of canary-yellow, and a green silk pocket-handkerchief. When he had wagged his forked beard up and down for a while, he confessed:

"I've been envying those horses on the walls. They have no consciences. What's more, they're all fortunate enough to be dead."

"I was talking this afternoon to a sirupy old chap who has just the remedy for your ailment. 'A woman of such mingled spirituality and physical beauty that a compromise might be effected, pleasing to Nature, and so to God!'"

And, after emptying his whiskey-and-soda down his throat, Sebastian demanded:

"What could be more simple?"

"What could be more difficult! Especially, if one can't even look at her any more, since she's gone away!"

Sebastian inspected him for a time in perplexity.

"Who the devil are you in love with this afternoon?"

"Ah, I'm not so fickle as some desperadoes of my acquaintance!"

"Well, if you mean the Innocenti——"

"*Accidente!* That creature! What do you take me for? I shall never see her again! That is, unless I'm fool enough to drink champagne with my dinner to-night."

"Then whom are you talking about, if it's fair to ask?"

"Is it possible you don't know she left to-day, to catch the *Asiatic* for England?"

Sebastian felt in his head a shock as if from a slight explosion. The room grew dark. Everything seemed whirling round. Then, gradually, his surroundings emerged. The faces of Andreas and Don Livio appeared as before. He was sure his own features had not changed.

After stealthily clearing his throat, he remarked:

"How careful our Andreas is to follow the fashion, even in his sentimental exertions!"

Rising, he turned to Prince Campobasso.

"Thanks for the life-saver. . . ." To the other:

"See you later, Iokanaan. . . ."

"Why, we've just sat down!"

"I've been riding all day. I must get to a tub. Till to-night, somewhere, perhaps? . . ."

He went out, and gained his own apartment.

Disnisius was there, fitting studs into an evening shirt. Sebastian demanded:

"How long do you need to pack?"

The man started, looked at his master's face, then answered, quickly:

"An hour and a half."

"Get at it."

He tore off his riding-clothes. Disnisius, while running to and fro, kept sending furtive glances at him. At last:

"Shall I put the revolvers in the travelling-bags?"

"What's the matter with you? Have you gone crazy?"

"Pardon, Excellency. A lapse of the mind. . . . It must be in the air to-day. Something that keeps reminding me of old times. . . ."

## CHAPTER IX

AT half-past ten that night, Sebastian Maure reached Naples. At half-past twelve, from the deck of an Italian steam-ship, he saw the harbor-lights dwindle to the north. Next afternoon, there gathered in the south, cloudlike on the horizon, the tawny hills of Sicily. That evening he landed in Palermo.

The *Asiatic* was scheduled to call there next day.

He descended at the Villa Igeia, turned in, and again lay awake all night. The sun was shining, and he was dozing at last, when Disnisius came to tell him the ship had been sighted. At once he got up.

The last forty hours had been a sort of nightmare. Sleeplessness, wild plans invented only to be baffled by common-sense, rage that she was escaping so easily, had worn him out. His constitution was no longer adaptable to this kind of strain. He was amazed to find himself, at moments, not only exhausted, but almost witless. He had told himself over and over that everything depended upon this day: yet now he was in no condition to meet such a crisis. It was his first really poignant experience with a revengeful Nature.

He went down into the city. The Maqueda was crowded already with its beggars, touts, and impecunious dandies. The shops displayed their pinch-beck wares. Church-doors stood open. At tables on the sidewalk, vacuous-looking old fellows were



drinking their coffee. He stared at this orderly scene as if it were part of a dream. Why was he here? What incredible fall of luck could he be trusting in?

Perhaps she would not even come ashore!

He drove to the harbor. Some distance out, the *Asiatic*, at anchor, towered amid scows piled high with lemon-crates. Round the ladder row-boats clustered. Into them ladies were descending.

He entered a shabby café opposite the wharf, and took a seat in the shadows. There he waited, hopeless already, yet determined to stay, till the very last moment, in the path of chance. The habitués of the place were fascinated by this big, saturnine foreigner, richly clad, with a scarf-pin worth a year's wages, who remained hour after hour in the same attitude, staring out to sea. At last, the passengers who had landed, and set out gayly, for their day's excursion, began to return and re-embark. He had sat there from nine till six. He told a waiter to make sure of the *Asiatic's* sailing-time.

"Signore, she is due to leave this minute. . . ."

He returned to the Villa Igeia. Disnisius had laid out his evening-clothes. He bathed and changed mechanically. Could it be possible that this was the end?

But suppose she were not on board the *Asiatic* after all!

He snatched up hat and overcoat, went downstairs, hailed a cab, regained the water-front. The ship was still at anchor. He called a boatman.

"What's keeping her?"

"The lemons, Excellency. For some reason, they take a devil of a while to load, do lemons! But now the last scow is almost empty."

"Can you make it?"

"Eh, the Madonna has that in her pocket! Let us try."

They reached the *Asiatic's* ladder just as sailors were preparing to raise it.

He found himself on the deck. Two young ship's officers were peering down into the hold, where the steam-cranes were lowering the last crates out of sight. But a boatswain approached him with a questioning look. Sebastian nodded good-evening, asked if dinner was on, and went into the smoke-room. It was deserted. A steward brought him a cocktail.

"A nice day, sir. Been ashore, sir?"

"Yes."

"A dirty town, sir. No wonder you're not quite ready for dinner, sir, if I may take the liberty."

"Bring me a passenger list."

Her name was the first he saw.

The ship was on the point of starting. Still he remained. A force outside himself seemed to be keeping him here. He began to feel the relief of a miraculous reprieve. She was not leaving him! It was not finished! Even if she shut herself up in her cabin as soon as aware of his presence, in a way they would still be together a little while longer. . . .

His body gradually relaxed. The abnormal tension of his nerves abated. He ordered another cock-

tail. Five minutes later he realized, with drowsy satisfaction, that the *Asiatic* had put to sea. . . .

Twilight fell rapidly. Dinner must be nearly over? He went out and climbed a staircase to the boat-deck.

The breeze was soft and warm, the dim sea calm. In the black distance, Palermo glittered under a pale-yellow nimbus. And the great ship, trembling all over, was separating him, at the same time, from his hopelessness.

"This isn't for nothing, this impulse!"

No one came near the bench on which he had stretched himself. No one, in fact, could be aware that an extra passenger was aboard. He ought to go down soon, however, and see about a cabin. . . . The best ones were sure to be taken. . . . The barber would probably have nothing to sell him but deck shoes and collars. . . . He was going to miss Dis-nisius. . . .

All this bothered him so little that he fell asleep while thinking of it.

Six bells awoke him. Decidedly, a bed would be more comfortable! But he thought it advisable, before visiting the office, to explore his pocket-book. The first thing he chanced on was Sangallo's visiting-card.

After a time, smiling grimly, he scribbled across the back of it:

*If you're still about, you might like to hear the absurd adventure that makes us shipmates. Could you find your way to the port side of the boat-deck? I'll try to excuse myself, there, for putting you to the trouble.*

A sailor was passing. Sebastian Maure instructed him to send the card below.

And after a while he saw her approaching through the shadows.

She wore a fragile dress of flower-sprinkled gauze laid over amber satin. Her neck was bare, but round one wrist she had twisted a chain of diamonds. From her blonde tresses to her golden slippers she was so fair a thing, so stored with radiance waiting for the chance to show forth all dazzling, that in the very obscurity of the boat-deck she appeared to shine with a mysterious effulgence.

To him she seemed, after all those hours of anxiety and despair, more beautiful, more precious, more necessary than ever before. He could not move or speak, while contemplating this inestimable treasure of the flesh, which he desired with all the violence of his nature.

It was she who, after a moment of amazement, ended the silence. Her voice was strange:

"Where is Signore Sangallo?"

"Sangallo! Is he aboard, too?"

"I have his card——"

She held it up. He took it out of her hand.

"Permit me."

In the dim light, he made a pretence of examining it.

"What a strange thing! I suppose I can never persuade you this wasn't intentional. . . ."

After a silence, she faltered:

"You wrote that?"

"Certainly."

"And counted on my coming here, to talk to you?"

"I hoped——"

"You expect me to believe this!"

"You could come for Sangallo."

"It's always safe to come to Sangallo. He is a friend."

"And must I still be an enemy?"

She made no reply. He went on:

"Must you always think of me so? Don't you realize that one owes to the most unwelcome love something better than utter cruelty? With all the beauty that covers you and fills you, how is there room in you for this inhumanity?"

"You can hardly realize what you're saying. I'm engaged to marry Lieutenant Pamfort——"

"He's not that any longer. He's Lord Lemster now."

"If you prefer. . . ." She clenched her hands, then shot forth at him:

"It seems incredible that I should have to remind you of it! Must I go still farther? Must I tell you in so many words other reasons why I've always avoided you?"

He looked at her heavily, without replying. She turned to go. But he put out his hand.

"One moment. Hear me to-night. I'll promise never to trouble you again."

"I think we've said enough to each other already to last forever."

"Enough! Our lives won't be long enough for all I could say to you!"

He came a step nearer. Her pride prevented her from retreating. She heard him saying:

"Up there, when I learned you were gone, it seemed that everything vital in me had escaped with you. I felt that my very life had been torn from me. That I must follow after, and get it back. Or else, die on my feet, like a man whose heart has been torn out, and who makes one last movement, as if to clutch it back into his breast, and go on living. I came here in a sort of delirium, rushing through shadows, blinded by despair, but struggling on toward the light that was vanishing before me, that wouldn't stay, that another hour was going to extinguish forever. . . . I threw away the last remnant of my reason for one more sight of you, for one more sound of your voice, for one more glimpse of what I couldn't have. . . ."

He had begun with phrases; he ended with his voice shaking, his body trembling, his whole being wracked by the realization that it was the truth. She, for her part, had not moved while his lips poured out those words with all the flexibility and fire of youth. Her eyes were fixed on him in wonder. Despite herself, she was fascinated by this volcanic passion, the like of which she had never perceived before, which she had caused.

With a great effort, he recovered himself. He knew when to change his tone. In a different voice, he said:

"But just now, when I saw you coming through the darkness, a strange peace invaded me. All my sufferings were worth that moment. I saw you

again. I heard you speak. I told you once more what you'd been to me, and always would be. Even the hopelessness of this hour is touched by happiness. Even your antipathy contains its sweetness, because your lips express it. And now, every minute I hold you here is just another ray to light the future. . . . Those moments! How few of them there have been! How full of your enmity! And yet, how precious! They're all I have. They're going to be my riches. Is it any wonder I want one more to hoard?"

His deep voice was vibrant with the emotion of a man who could express admirably, at the same time, strength and pathos. But he knew that silence was dangerous to illusion. He went on:

"You have your idea of love. You're sure that idea's not mine. You have your ideal of devotion. You credit me with no ideals at all. But what love, in the whole world, could be stronger than this one, that's brought me here, stripped of all sanity, for a look of scorn, a word of anger, a memory of unchanged hostility? . . .

"No; there's only one kind of love—the love of a man for a woman. But it has many degrees of strength and frankness. And sometimes the clear light of truth blinds unaccustomed eyes. . . .

"My great crime in life has always been that I've revealed myself. Yet if I'd been ever so subtle, I couldn't have disguised this. It was an avalanche that your mere approach set moving. . . . But the one who caused it might feel without shame a little pity on account of it."

Her pulse beat fast. Despite herself, she was

stirred throughout. Her femininity was unable to ignore such homage.

She was still conscious of the countless detriments that made him hateful to her. She was still, perhaps, but half convinced of his full sincerity. Yet she felt her judgment, and even her repugnance, weakened by those accents thrilling with sadness and desire, by that face transformed in the starlight, and by the influence of the place and the hour—the illimitable poetry of the heavens, the mystery of the sea. The sea! Its eternal savor of freedom, of lawlessness, of Nature! Maybe it was that which, penetrating her heart, made her more nearly understand it all. There came to her a shock of illogical compunction. She made a quick gesture of distress. The half-inarticulate cry escaped her:

“Oh, but why! . . .”

“The world is made up of riddles like that,” he answered.

But his heart leaped. He saw that for the moment he had disarmed her. To-morrow, daylight would bring back her clear perception, the old distrust. Thereafter, every hour would bear her nearer to the influence of the other. These advantages, of surprise and strangeness, of eloquence and nature, would never reoccur for him in like combination. It was the hour to risk everything.

While groping for the means, he called to his aid the seductiveness of their surroundings. Pointing into the darkness, southward:

“See how the very elements combine for that eter-



nal deception! This breeze, full of soft odors, brings a promise of felicity. It comes from Africa, from regions vivid with color, dissolved in sunshine, or, in the moonlight, of an enchantment to make real that old dream of Aphrodite, stooping from the heavens, wrapped in stars, to spread the perfume of her breath to men. It comes to us across her waves, across the hills of Sicily—that land where men and women, and the very rocks, are always burning from their adjacency to her. Roses are in it, black roses against the stars, their beauty half blotting out that far-off splendor, yet letting through their petals such glimpses of heaven as one could never catch, if they weren't trembling between. 'Come back,' it whispers. 'Come back to the simplicity of what I offer. To what springs up, in its full flower, nowhere else so swiftly and magnificently. To what's more precious here, in its completeness, than all the world! . . .' But the ship takes us on. The sea widens. And soon that breeze will fall behind, to give place to northern winds, with different messages. . . . That's life. One hears a call, and one is borne away."

He turned to lean on the rail that ran along the deck, between the life-boats, as a protection against the edge.

Forty feet below, the black water, slipping rapidly astern, was full of phosphorescent light. The luminous particles gathered swiftly from ribbons into tangled knots. They spread into whirling patches of incessantly contorted outline. They expanded suddenly to fill the waves with their unearthly sheen.

Then they parted in fragments, shredded to ribbons again, disappeared like serpents into the depths. This play of light engrossed him, even at such a moment. In it he seemed to find some cryptic message, the solution of all dilemmas, that dissolved before he could decipher it.

In a low voice, he said:

"Come and see if you can read what the water is trying to tell me."

Wondering at this new tone, after a moment of hesitation she approached the side. Not too near him—in the interval between the railing and the adjacent life-boat—she looked down at the phosphorescence.

"See how it struggles to make its meaning clear, before it's whipped away. It springs up from nothingness. It strives to be united with itself. Then, separated, at the moment of contact, from its desire, it plunges back into the darkness. The black void that produced it quenches it. . . . Is that the answer?"

The strangeness of the scene, the solitude, the fervor of his voice, made her forget him as she had known him heretofore. Nothing seemed strange to her, any longer, on this strange night.

Then, all at once, from the mast-head, a ship's bell clanged. Reality, with that sound, pierced illusion through and through. She remembered where she was, and where she was going. She found herself. And, at that instant, an animosity more bitter than ever before sprang up in her, toward this man who

had made her feel compassion for perversity, and tenderness for duplicity. She uttered a cold little laugh:

"When you talk like that, you give me grave doubts that it isn't all melodrama!"

He did not move. But he knew at once that everything he had said had gone for nothing.

Abruptly, in the midst of the night, shone forth a tiny mellow flame, motionless, perhaps half a mile away, on the calm sea.

"A light," she said, in an ordinary tone. He suppressed his chagrin, while answering:

"A fishing-boat. There are islands to the south. Desolate, half-barbarous spots, far off from land, that civilization has no more than touched. But who knows if happiness may not be there for some? . . ."

He stopped short, dazed by the enormity of a thought. He looked down, blankly, at the whirling phosphorus. And it seemed to him that for a moment all those luminous intricacies stayed motionless, to make him read their message aright. Then they parted. And in their midst yawned blackness—as if something had plunged through them, into the depths.

In an instant, he had calculated the distance of the fishing-boat, the speed of the ship, the peril of the propellers, his probable endurance. Then he recoiled, while asking himself, "Am I insane, indeed?" But the fatality of all the day's coincidences sprang forth in his mind like a completed fabric. The se-

crecy of his presence on the ship! The loneliness of the boat-deck! The late hour, when the lower decks were bound to be deserted! The darkness, that enshrouded everything!

And this girl beside him, who, to-morrow, would pass out of his life forever, into another's arms!

Still, his body grew tense, bracing itself against this impulse, against a host of suggestions, subtle and yet tremendous, which had come to him through those feverish weeks up there in Rome, against something that loomed larger, that became more imperious, every moment—the invisible, vast force of Necessity.

"Death! Sure death, in the sea or in the screws!"

But a voice within him whispered in reply:

"All the same, there's a chance. And if we go, we go together."

"But afterward?"

"He who overcomes the present conquers the future."

And it no longer seemed strange to him. It seemed the natural thing to do.

Nevertheless, to the most reckless and ruthless spirits comes a final hesitation, when all the inhibitions of the ages combine in one last effort to restrain the irrevocable deed.

The little yellow light drew nearer. It hovered opposite his eyes. It began to fall astern.

He realized that he had buttoned his dinner-jacket automatically, and slipped his feet out of his pumps.

He turned toward her. She was standing in the gap between the end of the railing and the life-boat. Gazing out at that distant spark, she seemed oblivious to the menace of those thoughts. How beautiful she was—even when her eyes met his, and read in them, at last, the revelation of his true self!

With a convulsive movement, she tried to spring aside. But the life-boat penned her in. Behind her lay the naked edge. Her hands flew to her breast.

"What are you thinking of!"

"Will you give up that man?"

"Let me by!"

"Will you belong to me?"

"Shall I have to call for help?"

For a fleeting second he marvelled at her clear voice, her level gaze, her splendid bravery. But her courage made her the more precious. And her defiance sent the last of his compunction flying.

He reached forward. A moment's struggle, tense and silent. He put out his strength, caught her in his arms, and poised on the brink. At once she ceased to move.

"Death!" she gasped.

"Death or life—who knows!"

With his burden he leaped forth into space.

The sea engulfed them. White fire wrapped them round, then was quenched by the black depths. The waters divided in contention for their bodies. Two forces tore at them, one to drag them down forever, the other to snatch them back to air. Then a new power got them in its grasp, the suction of the ship.

He imagined the thunder of the screws, the remorseless pull, a vortex of foam and blood. . . .

At least, they should breathe again before the end!

Gripping that priceless burden more firmly to his breast, he clove, with great strokes, out and upward. The flood parted. The air rushed into his throat.

About him seethed a gleaming froth. Overhead, a vast bulk blotted out the stars. The stern towered over him. They were in the wake.

Suddenly, that monstrous silhouette sank out of the heavens. Against the firmament, the superstructure, the funnels, and the masts took new perspectives, and, while changing, were absorbed into the night. The lights only remained visible. They merged rapidly into a closer constellation, dwindled, and grew dim. The ship was already far away.

And there remained the open sea. . . .

He looked down at her face against his shoulder. Her hair streamed back from her pale brow. Her eyes were closed, her lips half parted. Her body was a dead weight. Her arms hung down limply: the water moved them to and fro. . . .

The commotion of the wake subsided. The sea resumed its calmness. Almost exhausted, he strove to discern the little yellow beacon he had counted on.

It was invisible.

Even the *Asiatic's* mast-head lights had mingled with the stars. The sea was empty, then? This was the end?

"At any rate, together!"

On his back, with her weight across his body, he

calculated the time he could keep up. And presently, when he had got back some of his breath, he sent forth, on the still air, the call:

*"Aiuto—help!"*

He waited. Then, again:

*"Aiuto! Aiuto!"*

Silence. Even she did not stir. . . .

But he would keep on moving so till lassitude became complete. Then, quite gently, they would sink together. . . .

*"Aiuto! Aiuto! Aiuto!"*

Across the water, clearly, a harsh voice:

*"Ma chi c'è—who's that!"*

And the little yellow light sent out its gleam, a hundred yards away.

It was the fishing-boat, turning, with a sharp rattle of its tackle, and bearing down on them. He saw the lateen-sail, the foot of a mast against the lantern-light, a human figure scrambling on all fours toward the bow. Over the gunwale a head leaned out. A youth ejaculated:

*"Capperi! Two in the sea! One a woman!"*

From the shadow of the sail, a barking voice:

*"A siren! Sheer off!"*

*"There's a man, too."*

*"Then she's caught him!"*

*"No. He's holding her up. . . ."*

The boat glided nearer. But the barking voice broke forth again, almost hysterically:

*"Sheer off, I say! Evil will come of this! Steer away, Ilario!"*

Sebastian let his voice ring out:

"Ilario, when I get into your boat, I'll teach your friend good manners!"

A third voice, from the stern, phlegmatic, rusty:

"Ah. It's a *Signuri*."

They spoke a dialect that resembled Sicilian, but rougher, and to Sebastian almost unintelligible.

The sail flapped limp. The boat came alongside of them. The youth in the bow reached down, and grasped Sebastian's hand.

"Besides," he remarked, "the woman's dead."

He was small, with a mop of black hair dangling in his gleaming eyes, and bare to the waist. Another joined him reluctantly—a wild-looking creature, blackish, long-faced, with the features of an Arab, half naked also, and very thin. Together they tried to drag the two bodies into the boat.

"Ilario!"

A figure left the rudder-pole. There advanced into the light an old withered fellow clad in canvas drawers and a dilapidated waistcoat, his face covered with white stubble, silver rings in his ears. At last, Sebastian and his burden were drawn aboard.

They laid her on the planks that ran along the bottom, over the ribs. Sebastian knelt beside her. What pallor! What immobility! Lifting one white, nerveless arm, he groped her pulse. . . . It was beating very faintly.

"Have you wine?"

"Eh! Is that likely!"

"As for that," growled the youth, contemptuously, "what use is wine to the drowned?"



"She is not drowned. She has fainted."

Without reply, the three resumed their places.

When finally her eyes opened, he settled her against the mast, with wadded coats behind her. Among the nets he found a ragged piece of sail-cloth, with which he covered her sodden dress of flowered gauze and satin. She scarcely moved. On her wan face, still clouded by faintness, was growing an expression of vague horror. He turned away.

It was a very little boat, rough-hewn, without a deck. Fore and aft, penned in by boards, two masses of dying fish gleamed in the starlight, slipping from side to side at the slightest movement of the keel. With its broad lateen-sail the rude craft made good speed, however, in that languorous breeze.

Where was it bound?

He did not ask. His rescuers did not question him.

One, the youngest, lay down again, and pretended to fall asleep. The old man remained at the helm, squatting on his bare heels, scratching his bristles. The blackish fellow, perched on a cross-joist, regarded the luminous ripples that spread out from the bow. In the impassiveness of those three wild-looking creatures there was something of the hostility and reserve of brutes.

Hours passed. The breeze freshened. On the left, the sky began to pale. Soon it turned green—then, rapidly, a raw, malignant red. The rim of the sun pushed up, and everything was golden.

Far ahead, like a ruddy jewel in a radiant void,

flashed forth a tiny point of land. No coast appeared behind it, or, indeed, at any other point. It was a solitary island.

Sebastian broke the silence.

"We land there?"

The blackish fellow turned this question over in his mind, spat into the water, and finally nodded.

"What's the name of that place?"

At length, the answer came, grudgingly:

"Turrigianti."

"You mean Torregiante?"

"I mean Turrigianti."

The old man at the helm cleared his throat. He volunteered, almost politely:

"It also has another name. An old name. From the ancients."

"And what is that?"

"*L'Isola da Vita.*"

"The Isle of Life. . . ."

In the dawn, they drew on steadily toward that destination.

## CHAPTER X

IN the hush of that calm sunrise, the fishing-boat, with Sebastian and Ghirlaine on board, drew near to Torregiante.

Out of the sea the cliffs rose in towering perpendicular. Neither at their base, nor on their summits, was there an evidence of life. Gigantic ramparts set against the north, they showed a blind front, repellent, violent.

But the boat, tacking westward, began to round the island.

There came in sight some caves. These the sea penetrated with a flash of foam that was extinguished suddenly by the interior gloom. Then the western headland, higher than all the rest of those high battlements, shouldered up. On it, amid the tops of trees, appeared at last a yellow wall—a solitary habitation.

Sebastian Maure addressed the ancient at the helm.

“Who lives there?”

The same half-hostile reluctance preceded the reply:

“No one.” But the fisherman’s rheumy eyes, sending forth a smothered flash, seemed to belie his words.

“Why not?”

After a while:

"Because it is too close to the Old Ones."

"You mean it's haunted?"

The old man, by way of answer, slowly raised his chin, with an inscrutable fixed smile that was no smile at all. . . .

This headland passed, the boat turned in toward land. The south side of the island came in view.

From the naked heights, a natural amphitheatre descended at a gentle slope. Its upper half was strewn with wind-warped trees. Lower down, it was piebald with little cultivated patches. At its foot, a miserable village huddled round the rim of a small, semicircular beach.

Of this nook the headland just rounded formed the western bulwark, while to the east another promontory, low, bare, surmounted by a rough bell-tower, curved out to complete the crescent of the harbor. But it was a harbor in miniature. The nearer they approached it, the more emphatic grew its pettiness and squalor.

The houses, straggling along the beach, were all alike in meanness and decay. Plaster walls, that had once been white, sky-blue, or pink, were fading to a monochrome of yellowish drab, relieved only by broad blotches. Flat-roofed, all taller than wide, all showing arched tunnel-doorways and loggias, or open galleries, with rounded tops like alcoves, they flaunted from their fronts a wealth of drying rags, as if decked with appropriate trimmings for some slattern festival. Before them rose the masts of fishing-

craft, drawn up, with faded red and azure hulls exposed, on the black sand.

There the inhabitants were gathering in groups. Their sharp eyes had discerned strangers in Ilario's boat.

Sebastian turned to Ghirlaine.

She had risen to her feet. Supporting herself against the mast, her face colorless, her golden hair dishevelled, her sodden dress clinging to her limbs, she stared ahead with glassy eyes, in which appeared an immeasurable, a ghastly incredulity. For the first time since that plunge he spoke to her:

"Now we'll soon have you dry and warm. There's the tower of a church. There'll be a priest, and a parish-house, of sorts. We've not left civilization quite behind."

In fact, he had made out, among the crowd on shore, the cocked hats of two carabinieri—those military police who are found in every corner of the realm of Italy.

Rowing-boats put out to meet them. Over the gunwales rimmed with scarlet paint, savage young faces stared at them in amazement. Questions began to volley round them. But old Ilario, in the stern, merely closed his eyes from time to time and nodded cryptically. The lean, blackish fellow forward, with the features of an Arab, at each new demand for information shrugged slowly, with a movement rather like a shudder, and spat into the water. Only the young one responded. And between the long rigmaroles that clattered from his tongue, his wild eyes,

under their dangling mop of hair, returned to gaze at Ghirlaine, at her blonde tresses, her bare neck, and the chain of diamonds round her wrist. Sebastian spoke to her again:

"You'd better put away your bracelet."

She made no sign, then, of having heard. But finally she shivered, unfastened the chain, and dropped it down the corsage of her dress.

The boat glided into shallow water. The sail came down. A dozen men, bare-legged to the thighs, laid hands upon the bulwarks. The crowd pressed forward.

Ghirlaine, as she stared round her at all those dark eyes gleaming in sun-blackened faces, those violent-looking bodies clothed in rags, began to tremble. Even the women, in their dingy calicoes and headkerchiefs, displayed in form and visage a latent ferocity, as of aborigines masquerading in the tag-ends of civilized attire.

Sebastian came to her. She made as if to draw back from him, her lips apart, her breast heaving, more frightened, apparently, by him than by the rest. He said, in a lifeless tone:

"Afterward, whatever you wish. Just now, though, you'd best let me help you."

He turned to the crowd.

"Get a plank."

At his words and accent, there rose a murmur, a tittering—the derision, involuntary in very simple natures, for what is strange. He swept his eyes over all those grinning countenances, that were grinning

not with honest mirth but with a sort of stealthy malice. . . . The murmur ceased.

But the two carabinieri advanced. Their cocked hats and blue-black coats cut swallow-tail were immaculate. Their silvery buttons and their sword-hilts glittered bravely. Their fresh, calm faces, that proclaimed them exiles from the north, were remarkable amid all that unkempt brutality. Two units of civilization, deposited, by the great machine of Order, in this isolated spot, they showed in dress and demeanor a strange dignity. Everything about them was reassuring. Yet Sebastian would just as lief not have found them there!

"A plank for the lady, if you please."

The carabineer whose stripes proclaimed him a *Maresciallo*—a marshal—passed an order to the crowd. A plank appeared as if by magic. Ghirlaine was helped ashore. When the carabinieri had ordered the people to stand back, Sebastian inquired:

"Where to?"

The *Maresciallo* was a strongly built man, almost as tall and broad-shouldered as Sebastian, ruddy, with a wide-spread, fair mustache. He cast a quick glance over Sebastian's wilted evening-dress, and Ghirlaine's gauze and satin. Then, noting her haggard eyes and drooping figure, he replied, emphatically, in pure Italian:

"The police-office is certainly no place for this lady."

"There's a priest in the village?"

"*Sicuro!* Let us go there."

And they set out eastward, along the narrow, net-encumbered beach, toward the promontory where rose the rough bell-tower.

The crowd tramped after them. Children, their knees and elbows sticking through their clothes, kept running ahead, to look back at this unprecedented spectacle. New faces popped out from windows and above the loggia walls. The cavernous staircases rumbled. Out of the tunnel-doorways emerged new figures, to join the following. All the village was at their heels, when the carabineers and the strangers reached the parish-house.

It was a little crumbling dwelling with soft-stone walls, that leaned against the church, on the spine of the eastern promontory, just beyond the village. The open door was surmounted by a wooden Crucifix and the Monogram of Christ. On the threshold stood a wisp of a man, old, yellow, vastly wrinkled, hook-nosed, with a long slit of a mouth perpetually smiling, and bright, shallow eyes. He wore a threadbare cassock. He was the *parocco*—the village priest.

And Sebastian, instantly appraising the simple honesty of his features, had his second disappointment. For he would have preferred another, possibly less unusual-looking, type of *parocco*. . . .

The old man seemed to understand the situation at first glance. He took Ghirlaine by the hand, patted her wrist, and peered, with a kindness none the less intense because a trifle wavering, into her sick eyes. At that look, her lips quivered; she swayed slightly forward; her hands clung to his; all her being sent



forth, as it were, to the good she felt in him, a mute, poignant cry for help. . . . He seemed startled by that look, and quickly led her into the house.

Sebastian and the *Maresciallo* followed. The second carabineer remained outside. There he explained to the assembled village the discourtesy of unbridled curiosity.

The room in which the others found themselves was barely furnished. On the stone floor, three rickety chairs stood round a table, which held an ink-well, a dish of purple sand, some religious pamphlets, and a soiled coffee-cup. All the windows were tight-closed. From the discolored walls a cold hopelessness seemed to fall into this atmosphere of stagnation. For some reason, to Ghirlaine, the place, instead of a sanctuary, was like a prison. . . .

Abruptly, her surroundings all receded. She had a feeling, unique and terrible, as if her heart had stopped. She moved toward a chair—it disappeared before her eyes. . . . She fainted.

It was Sebastian who sprang forward just in time.

“Is there a woman in this house?”

“Maria!”

“*Eccumi*—here I am!” answered a deep voice from the corridor.

And an old slattern wellnigh as broad as tall, immensely fat, her dingy triple chin adorned by sprouting moles, rolled into the room with an astonishing agility. She had evidently been waiting at the key-hole.

"Give her to me," demanded this apparition, extending two arms as formidable as a gorilla's.

"Can you carry her?"

She laughed, showing a mouth bereft of teeth, large, red, almost lewd in its unnatural nakedness. Without replying further, she took his burden, whirled round, and waddled out as swiftly as she had entered. To him, the sight of that long, beautiful body caught up and borne away by the squat, trull-like housekeeper was shocking—an augury, perhaps, which made him lower his head in sullen shame. . . . But from the depths of the corridor the woman bellowed back:

"Stay where you are, you others! She's going to bed!"

A door slammed.

"Capable?" remarked the *Maresciallo*, approvingly, as a man of action.

The priest, with a wry smile, assented:

"Capability—a gift of tyrants! . . . But let's sit down. One of us is weary, and possibly hungry also?"

"Rather," Sebastian assented, reflecting that he had eaten nothing since the previous morning. Five minutes later, he was swallowing bread and coffee.

That meal concluded, the old priest produced from inside his cassock two of those powerful cigars called "Toscanas," long, black, and shaped like shrivelled vanilla-beans. These he cut into halves. Three parts he distributed, and pocketed the fourth. One match, with care, served all. A cloud of villainous smoke ascended. The carabineer took out his note-book.

"At your leisure, Signore," he said, politely.

With a jerk Sebastian's thoughts returned from Ghirlaine to this more pressing dilemma. He leaned back, closed his eyes, exhaled a few smoke-rings, reflected rapidly. The others gazed with a respect that approached admiration at this big stranger, so much at ease in his ruined finery which surely only princes wore, so obviously the master of himself, for all the strangeness of his situation.

He began slowly, with the manner of a man who wants, at all costs, to be precise, to omit nothing important, to make everything as clear as day:

"I am a Russian. My name is Saranin Schaposchnikoff."

The carabineer, licking his pencil, made a hopeless try at those exotic syllables.

"What titles, Excellency?"

"I have none."

"Profession?" This in a deprecatory voice.

"I manage my estates."

"Of course! . . . Domicile?"

"Why, difficult to say. My properties are scattered. However, put down Malo Attymskoi. I was born there."

The carabineer, with the national carelessness for foreign names, dashed off his conception of what these words should look like.

"And the lady, of course?"

"Of course. The lady is my wife."

The soldier, his honest face instantly flushing, was so confused that he neglected to ask her given name. Sebastian continued:

"For more than a year, Signori, my wife has been melancholy. The doctors ordered change, travel, unusual scenes. For several months we followed this prescription. She seemed greatly improved. One might say almost well again. Then we came to Tunis."

His face clouded. They could see, from his expression, that he should not have taken her to Tunis.

"From Tunis we planned to go on to Palermo. I chose a way that I thought would amuse her and distract her. I chartered a sailing-boat, nothing wonderful, but good enough for so short a voyage. It belonged to a fellow-countryman of mine, who had gone inland to explore the desert. It carried a crew of ten. There was even a neat little dining-saloon. Indeed, we were tempted to pretend it was a yacht. We amused ourselves, those two nights, by dressing for dinner."

The *Maresciallo* nodded solemnly to the priest. His premonition had been right: this stranger was, without a doubt, one of the *pezzi grossi*, one of the "big pieces," in the world. He listened with augmented sympathy, as Sebastian went on:

"We had favoring winds. We found ourselves delighted with that venture. Last night, when we went below, the future seemed bright again. For my wife's late melancholy had drawn her away from me, so that at times she couldn't even bear my company. But this recovery was bringing everything back to its old basis. We even spoke of an early return to our own land.

"We had not left the dining-saloon, when suddenly we were thrown against the wall, the vessel rolled over, the seams parted, the sea gushed in. A great ship had run us down.

"How did this happen? Our lights must have been burning. There was no fog. The stars were out. Besides, a man was at the wheel and another was at the bow. Or at least when we went below. . . . It will never be explained. I presume the rest are drowned.

"I dragged my wife on deck just as the sea closed over us. When we came up, the steam-ship was already far away. But it isn't easy to resign oneself to death! I went on struggling and shouting. . . . At last, the fishing-boat answered."

The carabineer, his pencil poised above his notebook, remained in the same attitude, agape. But presently the old priest rose, approached, and laid on Sebastian's broad shoulder a tremulous hand. In quivering accents:

"My son, the work of God is plain in that miraculous rescue!"

Sebastian shook his head.

"You think so? The shock to my wife has undone everything we'd gained. She's where she was a year ago. Perhaps even worse off. All to do over again! It is too much!"

"Have faith, my son," the old priest replied, still patting the other's shoulder. "You will see in time. In the end, everything is for the good. . . ."

He returned to his place, sat down, and blew a

trumpet-blast in his bandanna handkerchief. Silence ensued.

Sebastian gloomily drew out his pocket-book, explored its contents, and with care extracted some pulpy bank-notes. Spreading on the table a hundred-lire bill, he said:

"Masses, for the souls of those who were drowned."

The old priest fixed his eyes upon this wealth. He stammered:

"Too much, Signore!"

"I should not be satisfied to offer less."

He took out six bank-notes of ten lire each, and addressed the *Maresciallo*.

"For the three who brought us ashore. Please see that they receive it each into his own hands."

The carabineer put the money into his note-book.

"Excellency," he said, respectfully, "I thank you for them in advance."

The stranger had gauged very accurately the local standard of extreme munificence. Moreover, he knew better than to offer money to a carabineer, whether for services rendered or in expectation of good-will. He put up his pocket-book, considered, then inquired:

"What communication with the mainland?"

"A small steam-ship, every two weeks, from Trapani, in Sicily. By good luck, it's due this afternoon!"

"Ah. . . . I shall want to send off some letters."

"But you yourself, Signore?"

Sebastian raised his shoulders slowly.

"What can I do? If I took her on the water again immediately, who knows how it might affect her? No; we must wait here at least till the next boat. But—where are we to stay?"

Said the priest:

"My house, such as it is——"

"I am not willing to impose on you so far. . . . What place is that on the headland, that we passed as we came in?"

The carabineer and the priest exchanged a glance, then smiled at each other rather foolishly. The *Maresciallo* replied:

"Eh! I suppose you'd call it a villa."

"Empty?"

"So to speak. . . ."

"Furnished?"

"Well, after a fashion. . . . The man who built it gave up the idea of living in it, before he'd quite moved in."

"And who was he?"

"A foreigner like your Excellency. But half-dead. Always coughing and painting pictures. Mad, they called him here. Until he went away."

"Why did he go away?"

The carabineer spread out his hands, shrugged largely, and again looked rather foolish.

"These donkeys—these natives! They get a thing in their heads. They talk and talk. Sometimes, if they talk enough, they make other people donkeys like themselves. Eh! A funny thing, gossip!"

"It doesn't affect Annibale," the priest suggested.

"Or Fannia!"

"Ah!" The old man made a gesture of distress. Sebastian said:

"The old fisherman, Ilario, told me that no one lives there."

"Oh, Ilario! Because Annibale is his enemy, and because he declares that Fannia, who is his daughter, no longer exists." The priest sighed.

"So the villa's occupied after all?"

"Occupied? Yes and no. They live there, Fannia and Annibale, because nobody prevents them. It's hard to come by, and Annibale has a rifle. And at night, when a man might creep up close, there's no one who'd venture there, for other reasons. . . . Of course, *Signor Maresciallo*, you excluded."

The carabineer inclined his head with dignity, then answered:

"Annibale has only to commit some little crime for me to visit him. As for his present state, if the Law considered it a crime for a man and a girl to lead their life, we others should be arresting couples every hour in the twenty-four. Their little affair is a family matter still."

"Well," demanded Sebastian, suddenly, "is this villa for rent?"

"For rent! That's a new thought. After all, it must be. The Syndic has the keys. Though the doors would naturally be open, Annibale and Fannia living there. . . ."

"I think," said Sebastian, "that I shall take it for a week or two."



The old priest looked disturbed. To the *Maresciallo* he muttered:

"All that stirred up again?"

"But maybe ended, this time, for good," was the reply.

"Another thing. . . . Annibale might be ugly."

"If Annibale's ugly," remarked Sebastian, "I shall be a little ugly too."

"Excellency," said the soldier, promptly, "if you rent the villa, the carabinieri will go with you when you take possession. There may be some trifling action as a result—unhappily!" Despite his last word, he looked wonderfully refreshed, like a man who sniffs excitement after infinite boredom. With perhaps an involuntary warmth, he added:

"Indeed, it's a pretty spot up there. It would enchant the lady."

"No doubt of that," returned Sebastian. Then, rising, he concluded, in decisive tones:

"I shall move in to-day. Kindly inform the Syndic. Good-morning, *Signor Maresciallo*, and a thousand thanks. If you see the storekeeper, send him round with some samples of his boots and clothing. Now, *Padre*, if I may write my letters. . . ."

The first letter was to *His Excellency, Boris Bashkirtseff, General Post, Tunis*. It contained half a dozen blank pages. The second was to *Disnisius Pappachzistos, General Post, Palermo*, and ran as follows:

*Tell the hotel that I have gone to Messina. Take the baggage there. Pretend to be awaiting me from Naples. But the night*

*of your arrival, you must receive a telegram saying I have been called to London. Leave Messina at once, ostensibly for England. Go to Tunis. At the Poste Restante, you will find a dummy letter addressed to Boris Bashkirtseff. Identify yourself as this individual, and take it up.*

*From Tunis send me some clothing suitable for rural wear, and a similar outfit for a lady, tall, and rather slender. Stout shoes, for a narrow foot. Best to send several sizes. Pack with these things the Mauser automatic, the rifle-stock, and about twenty clips of cartridges.*

*If there is a Russian Consular Agent at Tunis now, get some of his stationery. On it write, over the signature, Boris Bashkirtseff, that Monsieur Testyoff is still in the interior, but will be notified. Mention a shipment of money. Close with regrets. Arrange this letter so that it can easily be opened by the police. It had better be in French, for their convenience.*

*In another envelope, well sealed, and registered, forward two thousand lire, small bills. I think you have saved enough, out of what you have taken from my pockets, to pay for this remittance and your travelling expenses. Later on I will reimburse you.*

*If you have anything to say, write it in English, and enclose with the bank-notes.*

*Then disappear. It would be a good opportunity, and a pleasant recreation for you, to return to Balikisri, and settle with your old enemy. When I want you again, you will find a note at the Café Osmanlie, Rue de Sirkedji, Constantinople.*

*Don't attempt to meddle with my scarf-pins. I am still an excellent judge of counterfeit pearls and jewels.*

*All communications to Saranin Schapposchnikoff, Torregiante, by way of Trapani, Sicily.*

He sealed both envelopes with wax, and sent them to be registered.

The storekeeper arrived with a bundle of his wares. Sebastian changed into a fishing-jersey, a rough suit

of frieze, wooden-soled boots, and a felt hat. Thus attired, he went out.

The crowd had departed. But, at his call, a thin little boy, nut-brown and covered with dust, advanced round the corner of the church. Sebastian pointed high over the village, toward the yellow walls that crowned the western headland.

"*Picciutteddu*—little fellow, you're going to show me the path to that villa."

The child's eyes dilated. He recoiled, and crossed himself.

"*Ma 'cchè*—never!"

"I'm not asking you to go there, *Picciriddu*, but to point out the way."

The boy stared at the money in Sebastian's hand with a hungry, desperate look. At last, he turned quickly, made a furtive sign with two fingers, and set off down the slope toward the beach.

Fishermen dropped their nets, or clambered out of their beached boats, to stare at him. The loggia walls were suddenly lined with women, smeary-faced babies in their arms. None spoke. But Sebastian's guide cried out, in his shrill treble, struggling between bravado and anxiety:

"He's going to the Place-Up-There!"

Immediately there ran from lip to lip a murmur of amazement:

"The Place-Up-There! . . . Another mad one! . . . Eh, let him go! Annibale will discourage him! . . . All the same, a human being, like ourselves. . . ."

And a few cries pursued him, uttered by strong young voices:

"Signuri, take good advice! Leave the Place-Up-There alone!"

The Marshal of carabineers came out of a shabby doorway surmounted by the Cross of Savoy. Behind him three privates showed themselves, bare-headed, in white-canvas barrack-jackets.

"Excellency, the men are hardly ready."

"I'm going up alone."

"Alone! Annibale would put a bullet in your head before you even saw him!"

"I think not."

"Signore, I cannot permit it."

Sebastian looked at the soldier pleasantly.

"My friend, there are two ways of dealing with a rifle—to flatter it by attention, and to ignore it. To ignore it frequently saves powder, blood, and uniforms. Go back to your cards, and save your carabineers to deal to you again to-morrow. Excitement is no relief to dead men."

For a moment the *Maresciallo* stared, then stepped back and saluted. A new respect was in his face.

"Excellency, it is most irregular, and against a good half of my instincts. . . . But if I agree, it's because something tells me that you are Annibale's master."

"*Diamine!* If I am not! Since naturally he came into my service when I decided to rent the villa."

Followed by some young men, he went on along the beach, behind the little boy. They took to the hillside. Higher up, they entered the groves that clothed the slope from that altitude to the summit. Ten minutes' climbing brought them to a narrow path, hemmed in with trees all slanted in one direction by past gales. Here Sebastian's following stood still. His small guide would go no farther. He went on alone.

Among the tree-trunks, gray rocks were piled up here and there, as if shaken down by some vast landslide. On either hand, aloes, prickly-pears, and common cactus raised thick hedges. It was an ideal situation for an ambush.

Sebastian paused in a clearing to gaze back. Beyond the tree-tops, between two stone-pines that rose above the rest, he saw the village roofs spread out far below, the rim of the beach, the tiny fishing-boats. Through that high-set foliage the salt breeze sighed heavily. And, as it lulled, he heard, close by, the click of a gun-lock.

He turned to look up the path.

"Is that you, Annibale?"

Silence. . . .

"Annibale, a well-bred servant never shoots his master till hot weather. And, as I've just taken the villa, I am your landlord. Your service began, in fact, two hours ago. But I'm not paying you wages to waste your time in this particular way. Come out, and take your orders!"

Nothing moved, except the branches in the wind.

Sebastian raised his voice:

"Another thing, Annibale. You'll find me rather short of patience. I'm liable to come after you. You may get a cuff or two. Of course, a blow would have to be washed out in blood. But I have an idea that it won't be mine. In that case, Fannia may object to staying in my employ. A pity, because my Signura is with me. . . .

"You rascal, if you were born dumb, shoot off your gun, and let me know where to find you!"

Suddenly, from behind a cactus-hedge a dozen yards up the slope, there rose a tall, herculean young man, bronzed, ragged, of a ferocious sort of beauty. He held a rifle. His deep chest heaved beneath his tatters. His face was working.

At once, Sebastian advanced on him.

The outlaw jerked up his rifle. But the other, with a shrug, kept on, while warning him:

"Those old-fashioned gas-pipes are liable to blow up in a man's face. If you caught me after an exceptionally good dinner, Annibale, I could buy you a new rifle, but hardly a new pair of jaws. By the way, I hope your Fannia knows how to cook."

He took the weapon from the fellow's fingers, examined it, and returned it in disgust.

"In a few days I'll show you a real one. Meanwhile, I want to find myself in a decent house. Clean floors, clean beds, clean water. Tell Fannia that the Signura and I will be up by sundown. If you have a whole pair of trousers, put them on. If not, I'll

bring them from the village. What else? Candles? Blankets? Salt? Bread? Wine? I see by your ribs that you've been living close. . . ."

The outlaw continued to gape at him.

"Are you really deaf and dumb, after all?"

"No."

"A little more politeness, Annibale."

"No—Signuri."

"Then for God's love, begin to show some energy in my affairs!"

He looked the man in the eyes, smiled, and clapped him on the shoulder. The fellow's face changed; his eyes fell—it was a victory. Without further ado, wheeling round, Sebastian descended toward the village.

The Marshal of carabineers was just setting out in search of him, with the whole force—three men. Evidently, he had repented of his yielding, and begun to fear the worst. At sight of Sebastian, his features expressed considerable relief.

"Ah, Excellency, but you were wise enough to change your mind!"

"I have seen him. We go up this evening."

"*Cospetto!*"

But the soldier quickly turned grave.

"I have to tell your Excellency that the Signora is far from well. . . ."

It was true. Ghirlaine had passed from unconsciousness into a semi-stupor. When he entered the room where she was lying, she did not recognize him. Thus she remained, even while they carried her, at

twilight, in a hammock made of nets and oars, up through the woods, to the commencement of the path. There, at Sebastian's request, the carabineers fell back. And presently, at his call, Annibale ventured down, to share that burden with him, to the villa.



## CHAPTER XI

FOR a long while, Ghirlaine was conscious only of a pattering of bare feet on stone floors, energetic whispers, rough hands that touched her gently, the coolness of water on her forehead. . . .

Sunlight, shining through shutters, made patterns on a plaster wall. Then a candle flickered beneath a gaudy print of the Madonna.

She discerned, at last, a young woman seated knitting, copper-colored from the sun, black-browed, strong-looking, handsome in a wild, dishevelled way. She wore the remnant of a faded pink print dress. Her muscular brown feet were bare. She was almost at the threshold of maternity.

Ghirlaine moved on the narrow iron bedstead. The young woman, rising at once, approached. With grave sympathy, in a deep, husky voice, she asked:

*"È megghiu, Signura?"*

And presently, as the other showed no signs of comprehension, she turned from Sicilian to Italian:

*"Sta meglio—are you better?"*

Mechanically, Ghirlaine answered:

"I don't speak Italian. . . ."

"Ah!"

The stranger made a gesture of resignation, re-

arranged the coverlid, returned to her knitting. And silence again pervaded that dim chamber.

In the night, Ghirlaine woke to realize fully her position. The faces of her aunt, of Vincent Pamfort, of Sangallo, and many others, rose before her. Through the darkness, they appeared to gaze at her as if from far off, from beyond an immeasurable abyss, from a world that she had left, and would never see again. Then incredulity struggled against the horror of this thought. But she heard the faint murmur of waves below the cliffs. And that sound recalled to her, all vivid, the engulfing sea, the fishing-boat, the isle, the truth!

She began to fill the room with sobs. A light sprang forth. The peasant, half awake, glided to the bedside.

*"Tranquillu. . . . Tranquillu. . . ."*

Ghirlaine clung to this ragged girl, in whom she seemed to recognize a source of strength, a humble ally, perhaps a refuge. Finally, still holding that calloused hand in hers, she wept herself to sleep again. . . .

Once more the sun shone on the walls. The room was empty. Out of doors, two men were talking in low tones. Motionless, with cold shudders running over her, she listened to Sebastian's voice.

He was talking calmly in a strange tongue that hardly sounded like Italian. A voice answered him respectfully. Presently his heavy footfalls died away.

A woman's whisper followed, and a rustle of bare

feet. The brown girl entered. Over her shoulder, a massive young man peered in. When he saw Ghirlaine looking at him, he vanished.

At once, she found her present position intolerable. Despite her weakness, she might not feel so thoroughly defenceless if she were on her feet? Abruptly, her head swimming, she sat up. Then she remembered the ruined low-neck evening dress.

The peasant, however, with a glistening smile produced a homely frock of dark-blue wool, some coarse muslin garments, and flimsy kid shoes with long patent-leather toes. But when she had laid this costume on the bed she added to it, with a flourish, a shawl of crocus-yellow silk, fringed, and embroidered garishly with blue roses—a shawl such as peasant girls wear on their wedding-day.

It was he who had bought these things: yet she had to put them on!

As she donned this clothing of the poor, such as she had never even touched before, a sense of unreality returned to her, a doubt of her identity. Surely it was a dream? But the soft monotone of the sea persisted. . . .

There was a mirror on the wall. She looked at her reflection.

With hollow eyes, and blond hair all disordered round her pallor, she showed a new, tragic sort of beauty. In that face there was something strange—as if she were gazing at the features of a sister who had passed through untold travail. Tears blurred her eyes. But she repulsed this weakness.

"I must be strong. . . ."

Still, she sat down limply on the bed, and let her head sink back. The crude print of the Madonna was before her. She closed her eyes and prayed.

The barefoot girl brought food: spitted larks and macaroni, salty olives, goat's-milk cheese, red wine, blood oranges. Worn out by insistence, Ghirlaine made a pretence of eating. The other, her talk eked out with pantomime, ended by establishing a kind of intercourse.

Her name was Fannia. . . . There was some one called Annibale. . . . He had gone somewhere, because it was late afternoon. . . .

In fact, the sunshine on the plaster walls was turning red. Ghirlaine went to the window. Fannia swung the shutters open. And nothing could have been more exquisite than sea and sky and island, at this golden hour.

From that summit, which seemed to surmount the world, the enveloping sea appeared tilted up on end, till it filled half the flushing sky with mingled gold and amethyst. Eastward, the range of peaks fell away in giant steps, their salient surfaces all ruddy, their hollows thick with shadows of a smoky black. And the declining sunlight struck against the amphitheatre of their southern slope, which descended from bright foliage to rosy garden-patches, and from these to the little blushing village thrown like half a garland round the beach. On the farthest promontory, low, incurving, the church-tower blazed like a tiny shaft of fire.

She was dumfounded to find herself in this high, isolated place, so far from that spire, beneath which she had lost touch with reality—which had been, in the midst of her despair, an emblem of vague hope. But hope might not reach across that still, pellucid void! . . .

How could the world be so beautiful, at such a moment!

The brown sail of a felucca was wending home across the languid sea. It left behind it a wavering, wine-colored wake. On the strip of beach, black dots were moving among long lines of drying nets, chocolate-colored and rose-madder. After a while, a faint tinkle stole through the silence. The bell in the church-tower was ringing Vespers?

So life went on down there, oblivious to her tragedy!

She turned to find Fannia looking at her with eager eyes.

"*Bella?*" the girl demanded, in her deep, impulsive voice.

"*Si, bella.* . . ." But the words caught in Ghirlaine's throat.

She made an inclusive gesture, and asked her question mutely. The peasant responded, with an accent of that pride which comes to her kind at contemplation of their own little corner of the world, however humble:

"Turrigianti!"

"Turrigianti. . . . Turrigianti. . . ."

And the success of that exchange of thought im-

pelled her to a more vital effort. If only she could make this honest, sympathetic creature understand the truth!

Desperately she took Fannia by the shoulders, nodded into the house, shook her head with a shudder of horror, pointed across the sea. She was afraid, and it was Fannia who must help her. The girl regarded her gravely.

"*Si si, Signura. Pacenza—patience.*"

But Ghirlaine tried again. She made motions that described Sebastian. She expressed her fear of him. She showed her hand, bare of a wedding-ring. She implored the girl anew.

And Fannia, nodding with a look of pity, repeated, soothingly:

"*Si, si. Pacenza, Signura. Pacenza.*"

For a moment, Ghirlaine remained tense, quivering from her impotency. Then she left the window, and went blindly from the room.

She passed through bare chambers, close-shuttered, with white walls and red-tiled floors. The windows were not glazed. The doors had no locks. The house was hardly finished. One room contained two pallets spread with goat-skins. On a home-made bracket tottered a dilapidated image of the Virgin. Underneath was pinned a colored post-card. A scrap of paper!

Fannia, who had followed, explained that this was her room and Annibale's. Ghirlaine pointed to the card, and touched her breast. The peasant nodded readily, with a flash of teeth. Ghirlaine whipped the

card from the wall, hid it in her dress, and made a sign of secrecy.

An open door let in the sunset. She found herself beneath a portico. Before her lay a terrace. From its edges, the sheer cliffs plunged down, perhaps three hundred feet, into the waves. The terrace was covered with intertangled weeds and flowers—rose-geraniums, pink campion, asphodels, heliotropes, nasturtiums, marigolds. Over patches of sweet marjoram, bees were droning.

Then the hush was broken by another sound, an old man's voice:

"*Mille grazie*—a thousand thanks. *A rivederla, Signore. . . .*"

She glimpsed, beyond the eastern corner of the house, descending through the trees, a pair of narrow, stooped shoulders clad in greenish-black. It was the priest.

Her heart leaped into her throat. All at once, she found her strength again. Springing from the portico, she sped after him.

But at the corner of the house Sebastian stepped out before her.

In his blue jersey and coarse suit of frieze, his thick neck bare, his black hair disordered by the wind, he was a more formidable-looking figure than ever. Even with her shock of fright, the thought came to Ghirlaine that at last his physical self was matched by his surroundings. Something as violently bizarre as this wild landscape, as hard and relentless as these crags, was here, at last, revealed in him to the ut-

most. He looked like one who had finally come into his own.

His face, too, was pale, and rather more harshly lined than usual. It would seem that this triumph of his had borne in on him, also, a realization of its tragedy. He had the air of a man who, in winning, has lost everything, yet, knowing that he has lost, determines to ignore stoically the bitterness of that defeat, the ghastliness of the present situation, the entire fact that something unspeakable has happened. . . .

His deep-set eyes regarded her with the old blankness. His voice was as nearly colorless as in those first days of duplicity and atrocious inspiration:

"Don't call him back. Poor old chap, the climb up nearly did for him; and now, as it is, he's late for Vespers. But he wanted to bring you these——"

He dropped into her hand the diamond chain.

"His servant had forgotten all about them. She took them for beads, and put them away in a tea-cup. It seems diamonds aren't appreciated hereabouts."

She sent another glance down the narrow path, that lost itself, fifty feet below, amid the tree-trunks. The priest's cassock had already disappeared. But for an instant, behind a screen of cactus, something moved stealthily. . . .

Sebastian gazed at her. His mouth twitched; his dark face was slowly filled with blood. At last, in low tones, abruptly:

"How are you feeling?"

Her lips trembled. Her eyelids drooped. Her



shape relaxed in a long quiver. She leaned against the house wall.

He called, and Fannia appeared. He gave her an order in Sicilian. She set out two cane chairs in the portico. Ghirlaine sank into one of them. Presently, he took the other.

The portico faced south-west. On the high horizon shone the last splendor of the sunset. The sea was a great field of the palest blue, overlaid with a myriad amethyst and orange flecks. The sky, where the sun had just sunk into the waves, showed an intense rose-pink that merged, with the most delicate gradation, into a pale-green zenith. A hand's-breadth above the sky-line, extended one thin, straight streak of mauve.

The murmur of the waves had ceased. The foliage stood motionless. The bees had left the flowers. All the world was waiting, breathless, for the night. And the sweetness of many blossoms enveloped them, like a subtle presage—a sickening mockery.

She remained motionless, scarcely breathing. What could she hope for, from the man who had made this scene reality? What words could she find to move him with, when her wits were crushed, when her very personality seemed annihilated? And what culmination was he planning to reveal to her, as he looked out across the sea, with sombre eyes?

When he spoke, she had once more a feeling of illusion. For he merely said:

"You must forgive these clothes. I'll do better for you soon. And these accommodations. . . .

"I hope you could eat the food. I broiled the larks myself. If I had a chafing-dish, or a couple of decent sauce-pans, I'd put together some *plats* that might even have interested Monsieur Hamel, in the palmy days of the Grand Vefour. As for Fannia, I fear she'd never be enough of a *cordon bleu* to charm either of us. . . .

"And by the way, stick to wine and coffee. There's a spring down the hill, but brackish. Only fit for bathing. You'll find a new wooden tub, of sorts, in the alcove by your room. Annibale has orders to fill it every evening. He's out with his buckets now. I suspect he thinks we must be insane to want it. But I forget you don't know Annibale.

"He and Fannia have been using this place for eight months and more, as a stronghold against local public opinion. She's the daughter of the old rascal we came ashore with. His family and Annibale's have been enemies for half a century. They're not quite sure what commenced it. Our man thinks it was some matter of a chicken-crate.

"Annibale's an orphan—but don't pity him on that account! He decided one day that he wanted to marry Fannia. He used to loaf under her window after midnight. She fell in love with his looks.

"Old Ilario, when he got wind of this, tried to shove a knife into Annibale, a Sunday morning after Mass. Ilario, it seems, intended to marry Fannia to the post-office clerk—a brilliant match. Annibale took the knife away from Ilario in front of all the village; and next evening he took away Ilario's

daughter. For baggage, he had a rifle that I should hesitate to explode, and she had her *coperta del letto matrimoniale*, her wedding-counterpane, that she'd been working on since she was twelve years old. Perhaps you've noticed it on your bed.

"She had the counterpane, that is, but not the wedding. To come down to be married would probably have been the death of several people. The priest was a reasonable soul, however: he stood ready to waive ceremony and come up. But Ilario wouldn't give consent.

"So they stayed on as they were. Every week or so, in the day-time, Annibale has to shoot off his rifle at Ilario, to discourage him from sneaking up the hill-side. At night, no one would think of trying it. There's a superstition down there that this place is full of ghosts, as soon as dusk sets in. I haven't seen them. Neither has Fannia or Annibale. All the same, they're both convinced the ghosts exist. But there's no choice between invisible phantoms and the thought of losing each other. They're still lovers, apparently. And I think they've been very happy here.

"Annibale cultivates a vegetable-patch. Fannia gathers wild grapes and olives, and makes oil and wine. From time to time one of his friends would slip half-way up the path and leave a few luxuries—matches, cigarettes, a piece of brown sugar, an egg or two. They didn't starve. But our arrival was decidedly a fall of luck for them. From present indications, the only thing to drag them down now will

be the necessity of baptizing the baby. The baby, of course, will have to be baptized no matter who dies for it. . . . They might ask us to stand god-parents!"

She turned her head, to stare with wild eyes at this being who, at such an hour, could talk so. Surely, this was the fiendish cruelty of a cat playing with a captured mouse!

No doubt he read her thoughts. His face changed. He stood up, and paced among the flowers of the terrace. His head bent, his hands clasped behind his back, he seemed to be struggling with a desire to speak, to show her his real thoughts, to make a profession that both of them were afraid to hear. . . . All he said was:

"Roses, too. . . . One might train them to climb that lemon-tree, and cover it with pink, in time. . . . But Annibale must clear out all these thistles. . . . And build a fence round the edge. . . ."

He turned to fix his sombre eyes on hers.

"I beg of you not to walk out here in the dark."

Her heart beat faster. A strange light must have leaped into her eyes. After a time, without replying, she leaned her head against the chair-back, and averted her face.

The zenith was changing to the greenish-blue of turquoises. Low in the west, an orange glow was fading. The long ribbon of clouds, a hand-breadth above the horizon, had turned from mauve to purple. And purple shadows were creeping in, from either side, across the sea.

He said, in a dull voice:

"I'll leave you to yourself. If you want Fannia, clap your hands."

He hesitated, before concluding:

"She has instructions to sleep in a corner of your room to-night. Or, if you prefer, outside your door. . . ."

He went into the house.

And Ghirlaine continued to look out across the western sea.

All the world lay beyond that far horizon. As its radiance grew dim, the last of hope, and even life itself, seemed fading.

There stood forth for an instant, and then shredded away, vistas of great rooms lined with mirrors, paintings, gilding, where old chandeliers let down their blaze and glitter above jewel-crowned heads, silver epaulets, satin and brocade, snowy arms, red, smiling lips. Faces flashed forth—Mme. de Chaumont's, containing pitiable secrets, Sangallo's, full of a mysterious comprehension, Princess Campobasso's, as it had looked when the words broke from her, "To be seized, to be carried away, by some one who is really strong. . . ." Mme. Sémadéni's inscrutable smile was last of all to go: but something of her—a suggestion of the perfume she affected, a tone of the sea that was like the murmur of her voice—remained, as it had remained ever since that afternoon in the palm-garden of the Excelsior, when she had uttered, "This is strange. There is some sort of bond between you and me. . . ." Only Vincent Pamfort's

countenance failed to drift before her vision. She strove to see it. With a great effort, she succeeded. . . . She sank back with a low cry.

"What a nightmare! What a nightmare!"

Still, something within kept reproaching her for the collapse of all her old, habitual courage. To the rest this crowning injury was added, of finding herself no longer an individual. At the supreme test, she, who had always gloried in her bravery and self-reliance, lay prostrate, utterly disarmed of ingenuity and strength!

A convulsive reaction brought her to her feet. Swiftly, she went down through the flowers, came to the edge, and peered over the precipice.

Far below, the water swelled lazily against the shell-encrusted rocks.

Her head swam; an invisible force seemed to strain suddenly at her equilibrium. With a wrench backward, she saved herself. Retreating, her knees weak, her forehead wet and cold, she whispered:

"Not yet!"

And she turned to stare round her, at the blank windows of the villa, at the enveloping, still foliage, and at the path, already shadowy, descending through the trees.

And there, from behind a cactus hedge some distance down the slope, she saw, spying out at her, a face, a young face half covered with a mop of tangled hair—the face of the youth who had been with them in the fishing-boat.

An answer to her prayers?

His face disappeared. But she knew he was still there. She made a stealthy sign for him to stay, and ran into the house.

To send a message out to that world beyond the sea!

She remembered the post-card hidden in her dress. But pen and ink? Or a pencil? Her room was empty of such things.

On the deal table stood the soiled plates, the straw-covered flask, a tumbler of thick red wine. On the floor she found the end of a wax match. With bated breath, listening for the slightest sound, she dipped the match-end in the wine, and wrote laboriously, across the blank space of the post-card:

*A prisoner on Turrigianti. The house on the headland.  
Ghirlaine Bellamy.*

To whom? To Vincent? Too far! Sangallo? And what address? But every one in Rome would know Sangallo.

*Ernesto Sangallo, Roma. . . .*

The moment it was dry, she slipped out, and down the path.

The spy had made off. But she heard a rustling farther down the hillside. She found him wriggling through a clump of aloes. As he sprang to his feet for headlong flight, she caught him by the arm. The leaves concealed them.

He glared at her like a wild animal entrapped, with

mingled fear and animosity, yet with another emotion also smouldering in his small, savage eyes. His nostrils expanded, his bronzed chest heaved beneath the wreck of a striped jersey. He was undersized, almost emaciated, but covered with lean muscles. From his trousers pocket protruded the bone handle of a knife.

Nevertheless, he must be the instrument of her salvation!

She thrust the post-card into his hand. Her gestures explained her wish, and the necessity of silence. When he had understood that much, he slowly raised his shoulders, and let a look of sullen indifference cross his face. He muttered:

*"Eh! Ma cu paga?"*

With a short, violent movement, he pointed to the corner of the post-card, where a stamp ought to have been affixed.

*"Cu paga? Cu paga il francubullu? Eh!"*

She took out the diamond chain, and pointed to his knife-hilt. Reluctantly, he drew the weapon from his pocket, watched her for a moment in distrust, then snapped forth the long spring-blade. With the point she pried loose a diamond, and shook it into his hand. Would he understand its value?

When she had put the chain back into her bosom, his gaze, which remained fixed with an almost terrific covetousness on her breast, apprised her that he, at least, knew what diamonds were. And too late she saw that his face was strangely crooked, one eye higher than the other, his mouth cruel and false,



about all his features, at that instant, a look of thoroughly mature depravity. The visage of a criminal degenerate!

He held the open knife in one hand, the diamond in the other. He looked at her, looked down at the weapon and the jewel as if weighing them, looked round him with a swift, stealthy eagerness, like a cat's. But he heard some sound, and saw the trees all thick with dusk. He started, glared about him fearsomely, and scrambled down the hillside.

Frightened, almost despairing, but hoping against hope, she called after him the entreaty:

"To-night?"

He threw up one hand, and disappeared. She turned back.

Near the summit, she came on Annibale, running down noiselessly, bent double, rifle in hand. When he saw her he stopped short, stood erect, and touched his forehead. In full, grave tones, he uttered some remonstrance.

She went on to the villa.

From the portico she looked toward the west again.

Was her effort to succeed? Would rescue come? Was she to find again, in time, the world beyond that sea? . . .

Twilight unrolled across the heavens, swiftly, like a spangled veil.

She entered the house. With lighted candle Fannia appeared, changed from the afternoon, mute and impassive now. Worn out by emotion, Ghirlaine let the girl undress her.

On her narrow bed, covered with the peasant's marriage-counterpane, she heard the night breeze spring up among the branches. The waves resumed their murmur. Presently, she was listening to *his* footfalls in the portico.

Deliberate and heavy, they approached her window. They paused, then receded. . . .

They approached again, and again receded. . . .

That sound went on for hours. . . .

## CHAPTER XII

SEBASTIAN, sitting in the sunny portico, heard Annibale and Fannia talking somewhere in the house. The girl's voice came distinctly through the silence:

"I always thought I'd be afraid of a mad person."

"Why so? The hermit is mad; but who's afraid of him? Besides, this Signora's only half-mad, evidently. All foreigners are that."

"But why should a rich lady want my post-card of Girgenti?"

"*Cuspettu!* Are you asking me now to find reasons for what a woman wants?"

"Then she pointed to her wedding finger, and made signs that she was afraid of the *Padruni*."

"Probably her ring slipped off in the sea, and she's afraid that when he finds it out he'll beat her."

"*Mai 'cchiu!* Do big pieces beat their wives, like common folk?"

"Why not! I take it ladies are also women. Being women, they must often need a beating. That's reasoning!"

Presently, he added, in a lower tone:

"As for all that, who knows anything? What he has told me is probably all lies. Who tells the truth, in this world, if he can help it? Perhaps he's running away from something. He looks like a great thief, anyway, who would as soon kill a man as a mos-

quito. Perhaps she isn't his wife at all. What business is that of ours? We eat, and get wages. Only, if things begin to go wrong with us, and it turns out that he has the evil eye, it's easy enough to slip and fall against him, some day when he and I are looking over the cliffs together. . . ."

"Do you want to spend the rest of your life in the *ergastulu*?"

"An accident is an accident. I should steal nothing. We could weep and tear our hair in front of the woman, and she would pardon us."

"*Che!* Leave tricks, when tricks are necessary, to us others. Men are nothing but children, after all. . . ."

Sebastian could not refrain from grinning. This revelation of character diverted him. He felt no indignation. These people were merely themselves. . . .

Fannia spoke again, reflectively:

"How long did he say they had been married?"

"Two years, three years—what do I know?"

"There is one lie, at least. For she has never had any children."

"Who says that?"

"I say it. I who see her in her room."

A silence. At length, she continued:

"What was she doing when you found her down the hillside?"

"Who knows? Still, after she'd come up, I saw a man in a striped jersey running away. I could have shot him. But nowadays, when our stomachs are

full of food, one thinks twice of stirring up the carabinieri for nothing. Besides, it wasn't your father. It looked like Nino with the crooked eyes."

"Little Nino! It would be a new thing for him to spy on us."

"Times are changed. There's money in the house. And Nino has been to Naples. They even say that when he was in Naples he became an apprentice to the Camorra."

"Who says so?"

After a while, Annibale's voice responded, sullenly:

"No one. I should be a fine fool to gossip with a woman!"

"Eh! And who could I tell it to, up here!"

"See that you don't, all the same. . . ."

"Maybe it wasn't Nino. Perhaps it was one of the Old Ones?"

"No doubt—in a striped jersey! *Madrecidda*, what a lot of empty chattering! Wages to earn, supper to cook, and no fagots in the kitchen!"

"These days I can't bring in the load I used to."

"Ah. . . . *Puviredda*—poor little one, I keep forgetting! Stay here. I'll fetch them for you. . . ."

And Annibale, clad in undershirt and trousers, came out on the portico.

When he saw Sebastian sitting near an open window, he looked confused. But the other bade him take a chair. The young man's startlingly handsome face regained its service-expression, of grave dignity and self-respect. Lowering his powerful body, with a deprecatory gesture, into the seat, he accepted a

cigarette as courteously as a prince. His large, brown feet planted firmly on the pavement, he awaited conversation.

"Annibale, all this talk of ghosts is interesting me."

"Truly, Signuri? But perhaps there are none in Russia?"

"Only ordinary ones, that tip tables, and rattle tambourines."

"*Mah!* They must have little to do!"

"And how do these amuse themselves?"

"Should I know? They lead their life, as they have since the beginning. For they've always been here, the Old Ones. They're a part of Turrigianti, like its rocks. The tale runs——"

He reflected, then looked at Sebastian askance, as if measuring his courage.

"Would your Excellency care to see their dwelling-place?"

"If it doesn't affect you too unpleasantly."

"Ah, Signuri, I've lived near them these nine months! Besides, the sun's still high. And we can stay hidden in the trees. Only, we mustn't let Fannia know—or the Signura. Women don't understand the pleasures of danger."

"No?"

"But of course not, Signuri. And very fortunately. If God had not made them that way, there would be no holding them at all!"

He took his rifle from inside the door, and led the way round the house, toward the northern ridge.

Back of the villa, the vegetation appeared impen-

ettable. Branches and roots of wild-olive were interlaced like the limbs of wrestlers. Old vines, of grape, and rose-convolvulus, spread everywhere a net-work of mature festoons. And each short vista, between the walls of green, was obscured by a mass of cactus-spikes, a rampart of dagger-leaved agaves, or a screen of roses clinging to the bark of cork-trees.

But Annibale found a tortuous passage through this labyrinth. They emerged suddenly on the northern cliffs.

The guide pointed over the precipice. Below, the sea was bright with foam.

"Caves are down there."

"I saw them as we came in. A damp place, even for ghosts."

"Oh, the Old Ones live better than that!"

He led the way eastward along the edge. Sebastian found himself descending the sheer side of the crags, by a path, not two feet wide, carved out of the living rock in steps.

"Who made this path?"

Annibale, turning, on that airy ledge, indifferent to the peril of his position, explained:

"Signuri, it's always been here. It runs along the north side, to a point above the town. But I've never troubled to guard it. To come at the villa by this way, one would have to pass too close to Them."

He resumed his course.

Before them, the path continued to descend gradually for a space, then, as the cliffs rose higher again,

ascended. At its dip, there appeared through the foliage a tiny valley, running back inland, and occupied by some sort of crumbling stone structure. But Annibale stopped, crossed himself, and put a finger to his lips.

"There, Signuri," he whispered. "The home of the Old Ones."

"Then let's get on, and have a look at it."

"Go farther!"

"Why not?"

"Because we should never come back."

He moistened his lips.

"Signuri, I can see that you are brave enough to try it; but you don't know that the Old Ones are not to be defied like men. In my grandfather's time, that was finally understood for good. A sailor came home to Turrigianti, after seeing the world. His first act was to laugh at us, for still respecting the Old Ones. So, to show us what fools we were, he came up here, as he said to make an end of silly superstitions. My grandfather saw him go into that house. But no one ever saw him come out again. . . .

"Eh, when the priest heard it—if he was angry! He came up stamping, in his vestments, with holy water, to exorcise the spirits—or to discover what had happened to the other. He went in praying. *Tch!* He never came out. . . . That taught us our lesson."

A gust of wind set all the branches swaying. Far below, a wave broke against the rocks.

"Signuri, when the world was new, Turrigianti was



the first home of men and gods. For that reason its ancient name is the Isle of Life. Perhaps it was the Garden of Eden? . . .

"At any rate, when our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, visited this earth, all the old gods of the heathen ran away. It's said they came back here, where they'd been born, to hide. That they are the Old Ones. That God allows them this little corner for their own, out of pity for their downfall.

"Who knows for sure? But sometimes people have heard them, inside their house, talking together with big soft voices in a strange language, and crying. . . . I heard them once myself. . . . Shall we be going home?"

"You are going home, Annibale, to gather Fannia's fagots. I'll follow this path to the village."

"Signuri!"

Annibale's face turned pale. With a passionate gesture, he put out his arm, to block the narrow way. The other, smiling, remonstrated:

"There's no room here to get excited. Stand against the wall. Those are my orders."

For a moment Annibale gazed at him wildly, as if planning disobedience. Then his face, altering, showed, perhaps, something of the fatalism of remote Arab ancestors.

"Pass, Signuri," he uttered quietly, and stood back.

Sebastian slid round him, and descended to the valley.

There, in a nest of sunny green, drowsed the ruin

of a small Doric temple. Round it, some broken columns, moss-covered, lay like fallen tree-trunks amid the brambles. But the walls themselves, of massive, uncemented blocks, with crevices full of grass, stood firm. Even the roof, beneath its thatch of flowers, seemed intact.

He approached the narrow doorway. Within, a stone screen, reaching from pavement to ceiling, hid the sanctuary. He put foot upon the threshold.

"Signuri! Signuri!"

It was Annibale, calling out from the cliffs. in desperation.

Sebastian stepped inside.

And, from the blackness, there issued a sound as if of giants stirring in their sleep, mumbling deep, unintelligible messages.

"Curious! There must be an echo-well in here, that leads down to the sea?"

But remembering the sailor and the priest, he did not advance at once.

With one foot firmly planted near the threshold, he tried the great blocks of pavement cautiously. He found all firm before the screen, stepped round it, and struck a match. A dry rattling re-echoed, as lizards ran into the corners. And again that sound, as of monstrous voices, burst forth with an articulation weirdly human.

But there was nothing in the temple save some loose fragments of stone, and a low altar set against the rear wall.

"Not even bones? Then of course, the floor's the answer."

Stooping down, he blew away the dust, and eyed the cracks. From the corner he rolled out a weighty rock, and pushed it forward upon one end of a broad slab of pavement.

In a flash, the slab swung perpendicular on its axis. At either side yawned an inky pit. With a terrific rumble, and to a roar like daimonic laughter, the rock dropped into the depths. Instantly, the slab crashed back into place. The floor was smooth again.

"By George! Not bad, after all these centuries!"

When he had proved the pavement elsewhere, he examined the altar.

Small, like a box set up on end, rough-hewn, still showing chisel-marks, its top was hollowed out, where once a sacrificial fire had burned to some divinity. On its front, letters were graven. And Sebastian finally made out archaic Greek characters:

ΑΓΝΩΣΤΩ ΘΕΩ

"To the Unknown God. . . ."

For a time, he contemplated this relic of long-dead devotion—this symbol of mankind's perpetual hope, blind and yet constant, born, as it were, in darkness, yet rising perennially through the shades in search of light. His match went out. The sanctuary was engulfed in blackness. And the mysterious voices, issuing from the region of the altar, beat round him like the voices of immortals who, for thousands of years, in that solitude, had reiterated patiently the same cryptic message, while waiting for his coming.

Sebastian smiled grimly.

"Clever old devils! They must have made a fat thing of this, once on a time."

He struck a fresh match, and returned to the doorway.

Before the temple, in the sunshine, crouched Annibale. His face was distorted by a conflict of terror and courage. Quivering all over, he was on the point of springing forward. But when he saw Sebastian on the threshold, his jaws sank down.

"Annibale, I thought you were going home?"

"*Sanguinacciu!*"

"Since you're still here, come in, and let me introduce you to the Old Ones."

The young man pulled himself together with a shudder. Then, after a long look into the other's eyes, he followed through the doorway.

Sebastian demonstrated the mechanism of the pit-fall, illuminated the altar, exposed the echo-well behind it. Still, Annibale could not realize the facts. At last, however, his blank visage developed a profound chagrin, humiliation, and, possibly, regret.

"Only that!"

And presently, in a whisper:

"Signuri, it must never be known, this disgrace to Turrigianti!"

"Especially, as it would bring the villa much too near the town."

"*Eccu!* It must never be known!"

He touched the altar gingerly.

"What does the writing say, Signuri?"

"That men have always been fools."

"Then, *pri Baccu*, there's some truth in this place, after all!"

They returned to the sunshine.

"Expect me back at nightfall, Annibale. . . ."

Leaving him in a daze, Sebastian resumed his way along the cliff-side, eastward.

The ledge-like path again clung to the face of those gigantic ramparts. At one point, it expanded into a platform. Beyond, it dwindled quickly to its former breadth, where a careless step would mean destruction. But abruptly it ascended to the summit. Sebastian gained the rim of Torregiante's natural amphitheatre. Below him, to the south, there fell away the wooded slope, to meet the little cultivated fields, which, in their turn, ran down to the crescent of the village and the beach.

While preparing to descend, he noticed on the eastern heights, directly across the island from the villa, one lonely hut. The hermit, no doubt?

He went down the hillside.

In these groves, stunted firs brushed pomegranates, stone-pines overshadowed the red trunks of pillaged cork-trees, here and there a pale shaft of *lignum vitæ* rose amid the silver-green of olives. Through the still air came a bird-like twittering—the music of a pipe. And in a rocky clearing Sebastian saw a flock of thin, brown goats, with abnormally developed udders, bells tinkling at their necks.

Near by, on the grass, a half-naked child sat watching them, as wildly beautiful as a faun. His sun-bleached hair streamed down over his large, lustrous

eyes. He was playing on a flute of donax-reeds—just such an instrument as might have roused the echoes of this spot when nymphs and satyrs were believed to dwell here.

“Good-evening, Pan,” said Sebastian.

The child, his eyes darkening curiously, regarded the stranger without winking. The goats raised their malevolently cunning faces, and all stood motionless.

“My name is not Pan, Signuri.”

“No?”

“No, Signuri. My name is Little Paganni.”

“And I am the Signuri from the Place-Up-There.”

“So every one knows,” the child responded slowly, and made a stealthy gesture behind his back. Sebastian smiled.

“Why do you do that, Little Paganni? You think I have the evil eye?”

Again the small goatherd’s irises changed color. Without moving, his body seemed subtly to recoil. But his little brown fingers gripped the donax-flute more tightly, as he retorted:

“So they say, Signuri.”

“That’s something to know!”

“*Sissignuri*. Such things are good to know.”

Sebastian tossed him some coppers.

“At least, my money won’t bring you bad luck?”

“No, Signuri. For if it stuck to money, my father wouldn’t have taken his twenty lire from you.”

“So! And who is your father, Little Paganni? Is it old Ilario?”

"Old Ilario! *Ma 'cchè!* My father is Big Paganni."

"And, by any chance, is Nino with the crooked eyes your brother?"

"Nino? Nino is nobody's brother. He is a foreigner. He has been to the end of the world—to Naples, even. He writes letters to Naples, and they go by the ship. He wrote one last night."

"How do you know?"

"Eh, when one writes a letter, everybody knows! Why not?"

"Little Paganni, to talk with you is well worth the money."

"For me too, Signuri. Now I can buy an amulet against the evil eye."

"A sensible idea, since we might meet frequently. . . . To see you again, Pan."

"To see you again, Signuri," the child answered, with mature composure.

Sebastian went on his way.

Soon the trees gave place to grape-vines, straggling in low bushes. Cornfields appeared, bright with Sciacca lilies and poppies. Finally, in shallow terraces, came the garden patches, over which hovered a blue-and-yellow mist of butterflies.

But below, spread out the crazy roofs, the cracked house-walls streaked below the windows, the staircases ending in garbage-heaps, near which, through mingled refuse and wild flowers, wandered some bony, dejected-looking donkeys. The freshened east wind spread a pestilential odor here. Sebastian reflected:

"What an ideal place for an epidemic!"

Passing between two tottering houses, through an alley that was apparently an open sewer, he emerged on the stone-paved water-front.

The beached fishing-boats stood empty. The post-office and the few miserable shops were shuttered. Round a sort of tunnel, labelled "The Grand Café of the Sea," lounged a crowd of men.

The younger ones seemed uncomfortable in cheap Sunday suits of violet and coffee-colored German cloth. The very old displayed short jackets of green velvet, tight knee-breeches, red stocking-caps. And nearly all were staring, with grave preoccupation, at the girls who, arm in arm, paraded self-consciously along the dirty esplanade.

Their glossy coiffures were remarkable. Brass pendants dangled from their ears. Their hips undulated slowly under skirts of threadbare brocade—old family heirlooms. From time to time, they clutched with rough fingers at their head-shawls, which the wind whipped out in ripples of bright yellow, lavender, and pink. It was an hour of delight and triumph for them, this promenade! All of them, knowing perfectly the interest they excited in the men—in-corrigible *amateurs* of beauty till their dying day—wore on their full lips, curved in a certain way from long, secret contemplation of sentimental things, a shadowy smile of exultation and, as it were, expectancy.

On the beach, where an old black pig, with spindle-shanks, was rooting in the offal, two carabineers



gazed forth at the rising sea. To-day, they had donned their silvery epaulets and shoulder-cords; their cocked hats were ornamented with blue and scarlet plumes.

It was a *festa*.

The Marshal of carabineers made haste to greet Sebastian.

"Yes, Excellency—in fact, the great *festa* of the year for Torregiante. The feast of the local patron, Saint Giosuè the Admiral. Presently we shall have a procession. Don Vigilio is getting it ready at the church. But it won't be till dark, on account of the illuminations!"

And with the derisive smile of one who has seen a different sort of pageant, he pointed up to the loggias. There women were setting out rows of candles in paper cornucopias.

All the islanders stood looking at Sebastian in silence. Every face expressed distrust, uneasiness, or smothered hostility. Old Ilario's wrinkled visage peered at him from the wine-shop door, then was swiftly averted. The blackish fisherman—the Big Paganni—with the features of an Arab, looked elaborately at the sky.

And this inimical atmosphere seemed part of the gathering storm, that one could see stealing in across the spray-filled waste.

"Well," said Sebastian, "as everything's closed tight, I'll go."

"And not wait for the procession?"

"The Signora——"

"Ah! My humble respects, your Excellency."

"Good-night."

Leaving the beach, he took the hillside path toward the villa.

Across the sky gray clouds were racing westward. Already their shadows lay cold on the high wall of the villa. Beyond that point, the sun was sinking into a sea of blood. Through the woods a long, shivering groan resounded.

Half-way up, he saw, amid the underbrush, a scrap of paper gleaming in the dusk. He climbed over some bushes, and picked up a fragment of a post-card. It was scrawled with faint red writing:

. . . *Ernesto* . . . .

He turned it over.

. . . *on the headland* . . . . *Ilamy* . . . .

Rousing himself, he looked for the rest of that message. But he found no more.

At last he put the fragment in his pocket, and went on slowly to the summit.

There Annibale, rifle in hand, was waiting for him beneath the tossing branches. Side by side, the two big men contemplated the east.

Over the island, the onrushing clouds, violent in outline, leaden-hued, but touched here and there by smoky red, seemed to be raining down dark ashes shot with sombre flames. The wind-whipped sea was ghastly gray, and flecked as if with blood. Along the curving beach, uneven rows of lights were winking and going out.

"A bad night for Saint Giosuè!"

Fannia came toward them noiselessly on her bare feet, erect, her large outline showing with a certain strange majesty against the western conflagration. Said Annibale:

"Signuri, we should like to go part-way down, and watch the procession?"

"What about the Signura?"

"In her room, as always."

"She's gone to bed, Signuri," Fannia told him. "I took her supper in an hour ago. Shall I serve the Signuri's supper now?"

"I want none. Go on down, and watch for Saint Giosuè. But the rain will catch you."

"Oh, that makes no difference, Signuri!"

"The rain will wash our clothes for us."

Hand in hand, with swinging steps, they descended through the gloom.

The west had faded. The eastern sky became opaque. The dim vertebræ of the village were eclipsed. The lurid waters seemed sinking gradually into a black abyss. All the world appeared on the verge of being blotted out. But the little rows of lights still flickered bravely, though with widening hiatuses. And now the wind bore to this high headland, out of the void, the faint clatter of a church-bell.

On the invisible promontory where the church must be, there grew a wavering radiance. It was the gleam of many torches clustered round indistinguishable, glistening objects. It was the procession.

Soon, behind the torches, showed forth a mass of white robes, banners struggling to stand, and a high, golden thing that tossed from side to side, yet always reared its top again, and staggered on.

Lights blew out in patches, to be immediately rekindled. Sometimes the banners vanished, but presently they were up and moving. It was a desperate contest, that persistence of pygmies against the rushing darkness. It resembled a battle, waged against vast forces of oblivion, by atoms who would not give up their faith. . . .

When for an instant the moaning of the trees, and the boom of waves against the cliffs, abated, one heard a faint eerie sound, of men and children singing. . . .

Below the twinkling loggias and windows, the procession crawled round the beach. In a core of torchlight, the tall, golden object was revealed—a car, no doubt of lath and tinsel, surmounted by a cross. Round it flashed other crosses, and square, ecclesiastic banners veiled in smoke.

And those emblems, however haltingly, however often swallowed by the night, were always reilluminated, elevated, and pushed onward. They approached the rising ground. They even seemed about to climb the hillside. It was as if those sacred symbols would not rest till they had reeled up through the tempest, and brought light and succor to this summit.

He watched them almost with the intensity of a man who waits for the outcome of an augury. . . .

Yet when finally they turned back, he felt no relief.

For he knew that even in this place, despite all his ruthlessness, luck, and ingenuity, discovery could only be a matter of a little while.

The story of her loss would be spread broadcast. The carabineers were bound to send in their report. And the coincidence of this strange rescue from the sea would straightway suggest investigation.

In fact, his tale, his letters, his whole scheme of deception, had really been put forward without hope.

And already she herself had nearly succeeded, somehow, in giving the alarm!

It had begun in madness, but it would be greater madness to expect anything save complete retribution.

Still, as he stared down at the receding torches, he discerned, as it were, in that withdrawal a momentary reprieve.

"Meanwhile! . . ."

Meanwhile, the moment might be made to pay for an eternity of punishment? . . .

The lights were engulfed by rain. With an unearthly wail, to a wide-spread cracking of tree-trunks, the full violence of the storm burst round him. It roused an answering violence in his heart. The wind seemed to tear from him the little he had ever known of forbearance and remorse. On that screaming height, nothing remained but the elements of darkness and destruction.

Leaning heavily against the gale, he made his way

into the house. In his room he found a candle. He lighted it, held it up, and walked into the corridor. The rays, spreading out before him, rested at last on a tight-shut door without a lock.

He listened. . . . No sound from inside. . . . But the whole villa was shaking, as though seized with terror. . . .

He knocked. In the open, a tree crashed down. He knocked again. Even if she had answered, he could not have heard her in that uproar.

He pushed against the door. Some weight was braced against it. What? . . . Not she. . . . What then? . . . Was it not, instead of that obstruction, himself that baffled him—some vast inhibition rising up all suddenly to paralyze his strength, some unguessed power in him, roused from its long sleep, struggling, and almost stronger than his fuming savagery? . . .

He shook himself, set his jaws, and arched his shoulders. That opposition, material or immaterial, yielded. His weight against the panel, he drove aside a heavy chest of drawers. . . .

A cry, and the creaking of a bed.

"You're awake?"

Silence. . . .

"Put something round you. I want to talk to you."

Lifting the candle, he stepped into the room.

Tall, slender, all in white, she was standing with her back against the shutters, her arms spread out along the wall, her pale, slender feet clutching at the

tiles. Over each shoulder hung down on her breast a shimmering, thick braid. Her eyes were enormous, and fixed on his with an expression he had never seen in any eyes before.

She looked like Artemis, disarmed, isolated, utterly at bay, yet shining still with a divine defiance.

## CHAPTER XIII

SHE saw him set down the candle, toss his dripping hat into a chair, and shut the door. Still the gale penetrated that dim room. The light flickered. Over walls and ceiling moved swiftly monstrous shadows, as of great, thronging wings. And she remembered Mme. Sémadéni's words, uttered ages ago, surely in another life:

"The wind of their wings sweeps us forward. . . ."

So, at last, they had swept her to this culmination of all nightmares, finally to descend, and hover thick about her head.

Raindrops covered Sebastian's rough suit of frieze. His wet visage was colorless. And in that mask his dark eyes gleamed with a violence which revealed the storm within—a storm perhaps even fiercer than the tempest raging out of doors. He looked like the personification of those strident elements that hurled themselves against the villa—the epitome of their destructive force and tamelessness. The last shreds of the thin disguise which he had worn so carelessly in Rome were swept away. She felt that she was face to face with something, as it were, utterly primordial.

But she heard him repeating, in a strange voice:

"Come, please—put something round you. . . ."

He perceived, on a chair by the bed, the yellow



shawl. To forestall his approach, she snatched it up, and wrapped it round her shoulders. He continued to peer about him.

"I certainly brought up some slippers with the other things. . . ."

Suddenly, in quivering tones, she cried:

"Is there nothing natural about you? Nothing human? Nothing to make you realize all you've done, and what you're doing?"

Somewhere a door slammed shut. Through the crashing of the storm, a laugh sounded and was stifled. Fannia and Annibale had come in. She thought—Two simple, honest souls not thirty feet away! . . . But his big figure loomed before the door. And she did not dare to make a movement that might end his immobility.

At last, he uttered:

"I know; the world isn't like this. Such things don't happen. It's an incredible business. That is, if we look at it from the view-point of the others. But there's a different view-point. And, strange as it may seem to you, the natural one.

"A man desires a woman. Everything rises up to oppose him. He breaks through all opposition, and takes her. . . . So men did, when they were themselves. So they do yet, in places where they've not been civilized into slavery. So they may do even in the midst of civilization, if they've remained individuals.

"What I've done, every man, who loves and has been denied, would like to do, even to-day. Only,

with those others, this thought has been repressed by cowardice. I merely happen not to have been affected that way. . . .

"When I first laid eyes on you, it seemed to me that I saw a being absolutely unique, as solitary amid all that extravagance and empty hubbub as myself, more fatal than Helen, more precious than life. I felt that I'd been searching for you always. Something told me that no one in the universe but you could bring me those unimaginable things that I have never found, that I have been longing for forever as a man, dying in the wilderness, longs for clear water. . . . To win you I'd have gone to infinitely greater lengths than these. I could have torn down cities, in another age, or plunged a whole land in blood. You were worth any price—inconceivable consequences, penalties, and torments.

"Not sanity, but madness—yet surely a divine madness. It caught us up together and cast us here, into this wild solitude, into the heart of this tempest. . . .

"Hark how it flows! It sweeps everything before it. All nature yields or breaks. It is the very voice of Fate. . . .

"Ah, most beautiful, most precious thing in all the world you'll never find another love like this, or another such mortal hour! All we've lived apart, all we have planned apart, was false. The truth never began for you and me until the day we met. It lies nowhere save in depths of your eyes and mine. Let's read it there at last! . . ."

She realized that he was closer to her. She saw his hands stretched out. And as once before, it was his hands that frightened her the most, that made her suddenly weaker and nearer faintness, that seemed, being so insidiously fine and different from the rest of him, the hands of a more perilous personality than he was himself, if perilousness lay in such suggestion as had never before touched her. . . .

In that moment, she felt that this scene had always been preparing. Pictures flashed before her eyes in swift succession—rooms, landscapes, faces, in every combination fashioned to make ready this hour. Crushed beneath this conviction, so poignantly aware of her loneliness and helplessness amid this solitude, and the tempest that nature had called forth indoors and out, she felt herself slipping, numb and hopeless, into the trap of Destiny. But all at once, as those altering pictures blurred before her eyes, she saw the face of Vincent Pamfort. . . .

Courage returned to her in a hot flood. He was close beside her. With one swift movement, she whipped from beneath the pillow a long-bladed kitchen-knife, and set the point against her breast. Her head thrown back, looking at him through a mist, she gasped:

“If you come nearer, if you raise your hand, I’ll drive this into my heart.”

She did not expect him to believe her. Tense, pulseless, with all her faculties centred on the fingers round the knife-hilt, she awaited his onslaught and effort to disarm her. His first gesture she was

ready to baffle in a flash. She felt sure her last hour had struck.

And she was conscious, in that instant, not of fear, but of a terrible exultation. After all, she would triumph!

But he remained motionless. His features seemed to leap forth all vivid, shorn of their last disguise. His irises dilated. An intense pallor filled his face. His mouth moved spasmodically, but no words came. His eyes remained fixed on the knife-point, which pressed in the thin stuff of her night-dress under her left breast.

In that room unrolled an eternity of silence.

At last, in a dead voice, he breathed:

"I'm going to step back. . . . Don't— For God's sake, don't mistake me. . . ."

Very slowly, he lowered his arm, retreated, and leaned against the door. He looked dazed. His forehead glistened. His deep chest heaved, as if he had just emerged from some terrific struggle. For the first time, she saw this man unstrung, helpless from weakness, mastered.

There broke from his throat the words:

"You'd have done it!"

And presently he repeated:

"You'd have done it. You'd have destroyed all that!"

He drew in a long, shivering breath.

"Give me your word— If I promise you——"

His voice failed him. He bowed his head, then raised it, and achieved one straight look at her.

"I promise you. . . . No, to-morrow I'll promise you. That's it. To-morrow. . . ."

He turned blindly to the door, opened it, and left the room.

The knife tinkled on the tiles. She collapsed across the bed.

That night was interminable. . . .

Toward morning the storm abated. When day had dawned, Ghirlaine pushed the shutters open, and gazed across a tumultuous sea. Westward, dark clouds were still massed heavily; but the wind had changed. Low in the east, the sun was striving to shine through ragged vapors.

Fannia entered with bread and coffee. Ghirlaine bathed and dressed, went out to the portico, and sank into a chair. Soon Sebastian came through the devastated flower-beds, and stood before her.

Both were disfigured by exhaustion and emotion. Their mutual alteration, their like evidences of suffering—at least they had that much in common! It put them, somehow, more nearly on the same ground. It seemed to make conflict impossible for the moment. This morning they were equally disarmed.

Sitting down on the edge of the porch, he looked about him. Over the sodden ground, and in the portico, were scattered deep-red rose-petals, like drops of blood.

He said:

"Now, you must promise me you'll never think of that again?"

At length, she responded:

"I promise you that if last night repeats itself——"

His face twitched.

"But I swear that last night will never repeat itself."

Laying her head against the chair-back, she closed her eyes.

"What could you swear by? I feel sure that no human sentiments mean anything to you. All the lies you've uttered, all the barbarities you've accomplished, lead me to expect nothing but fresh treachery and violence."

"I suppose you're right. Though love and war . . . As for my promise, though, you can accept that safely. I'm not a simple brute—whatever you think. Since no response is possible, for me anything more is quite out of the question."

She opened her eyes, to stare at him in amazement. Something like a low laugh escaped her. And she asked him, her voice bitter with contempt:

"Is it possible that your insanity went so far as to include that hope?"

Whatever his thoughts were then, he kept them to himself. Looking away, he shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"I was mistaken, it would seem, in both of us. . . ."

Was it not an admission of complete defeat? A new hope flickered up in her heart. When she was sure of the steadiness of her voice, she said:

"And now?"

He made no reply. She persisted:

"I suppose you realize that this can't continue indefinitely? That even here such things can't pass unnoticed? That it's all bound to come out?"

"Naturally. I realize all that. Of course, I've done everything I could to prevent it. I've been as ingenious as the circumstances would permit. But I knew from the first it was a losing fight. Up there, they'll soon put two and two together. They'll come for you post-haste. My friends the carabineers will turn straightway into enemies. We shall have church, state, and army climbing to the rescue. The devil to pay in earnest!"

"This unnatural frankness! What new duplicity lay behind it?"

He went on:

"I may as well tell you that if I find myself prepared in time my impulse will be to stand them off as long as possible. At least that would be a harmonious conclusion to my career."

He stood up, and for a while contemplated her with his sombre eyes.

"You see, I can't give you up voluntarily. Unhappily, my nature still finds that intolerable. When I think of those others, who'll come inevitably, and take you from me, I feel a hatred for them that must have its outlet. They're going to despoil me of all that I consider worth while in life. But they sha'n't find that easy. They've got to buy their victory at a heavy price.

"No doubt it will all end soon enough. Till it

does, I demand of life, if not the happiness I hoped for in my folly, at least a shadow of that happiness. For a little while longer I must look at you, and perhaps hear your voice. I must wake in the morning to feel that you're not yet gone. I must go to bed at night hoping to see you at least once again. . . .

"They say, up there, that a great love is capable of any sacrifice. . . .

"Well, I believe that; though my interpretation of the idea isn't theirs. Perhaps—for who can tell just how this will affect your future—I've sacrificed you. If I have, it was with the crazy hope that deep in your heart the same instincts existed as in mine—instincts that were bound to free themselves when confronted with so intense a call, that would rise, all flaming, high above the world. . . . That you would come to feel the sacrifice no sacrifice at all. . . .

"But if it turns out that I've sacrificed you, at least I'll have sacrificed myself also. Not in reputation, naturally: for I haven't that to offer up. From the stand-point of those others, and of you, all I could pay over would be my life. I accept that judgment. They shall have it—at my price."

He pondered awhile, then concluded:

"I know of no other atonement, unfortunately, that I'm capable of making."

Presently he left her.

She considered these ideas without surprise.

The old, reasonable world lay very far away. She saw its ballrooms, full of calm-faced men personifying courtesy and self-possession, its tea-gardens



afflutter with women who lived the thin-blooded romances they fastened upon others, all its gilded corners, its forcing-beds for trivial daring that was blighted by a pervasive cautiousness.

Here things were different! In this spot, the very rocks and foliage had an aspect intensely savage. Here the elements attained an unnatural ferocity. And here she was isolated with one who seemed the essence of untrammelled violence. What could be impossible?

She foresaw terrible consequences of some sort impending. And, at this thought, there stirred in her heart, beneath that exquisite veneer with which inheritance and cultivation had bedecked her, something unprecedented. What was it?

Did she feel, in the depths of her being, despite her present misery and all the dilemmas of the future, a faint thrill of absolutely primitive exultation? The combat of strong men grappling to the death, and she its object!

She repulsed this suspicion in horror. And yet . . .

She watched him descend the hill-path, beyond the eastern corner of the villa, through the trees. The torn foliage hid him. She supposed he had gone down to the village, to set moving some fresh trickery.

Indeed, that was his intention. But, where the path turned, he came on Annibale climbing up, slightly out of breath, black-browed, tucking away beneath his waistband a sheathed stiletto.

Master and man stopped short, and eyed each other. Instantly Annibale's face became illegible, with the instinctive caution of his kind on finding themselves surprised in mischief.

"Who was it?" asked Sebastian.

Annibale raised his shoulders deprecatingly.

"Nothing to bother you with, Signuri," he answered, gently. "I think now he'll keep away for a while. Eh, and I almost had him! But a root caught my foot. And he jumped from under my hands just like a flea. He moves, that little animal!"

And Annibale let slip, with a wistful look, one of those vivid imprecations, of mingled indecency and blasphemy, which roll from the lips of the *basso popolo* of Italy without a thought of harm.

"So, it was Nino with the crooked eyes?"

The young man appeared amazed.

"Ah! You've noticed his visits too, Signuri!"

"You'll find in time, Annibale, that I notice everything. But there's one thing I don't quite understand. Why should you go so far, without my permission, as to offer Nino the salute of the stiletto?"

Annibale, glancing away, replied evasively:

"Because he expects it. He knows that trespassers are forbidden here. If I did less, he wouldn't consider me a man."

Sebastian shook his head.

"I can't have my servant knifing people without my orders, stirring up the carabinieri, and turning my house into a fort. Later on, you may possibly

get as much excitement as you want. Till then, remember that any row you start is going to affect me, too. As for old Ilario, be very careful nowadays, if you have to drive him back, not to put a bullet through him. And as for Nino, a beating would do at present. Who ever shows bruises to the police? But a dead body loses no time in entering a complaint."

Annibale reflected. At last, he came to an extraordinary resolution.

"Signuri, I am going to tell you everything, straight from the mouth."

"That's what I expect, Annibale."

"*Eccu!* . . ."

He peered up the path, before saying:

"You must know, Signuri, that this Nino isn't one of our own people. He came here on a ship, five years or so ago. It was rumored that he was a fugitive, who'd lived the Bad Life in Naples."

"In other words, that he'd been an apprentice to the Camorra."

Annibale stared.

"That's known to you, too?"

"Go on."

"Since then, he's been back to Naples once. But about the time that other Signuri commenced to build this villa, he returned. At once, he smelled money up here. He began to crawl round this hill, to spy on that Signuri, and learn his habits. But only in daytime. He was afraid of the Old Ones, for all that he was a foreigner. Once, when the twi-

light caught him, he thought he saw them. It was I. I'd been trapping a mess of larks, to throw into Fannia's window. A part of my courtship, Signuri! It led me to find out his tricks.

"Perhaps, after that, he was afraid to go on alone? At any rate, he wrote a letter to Naples. Presently two strangers came—little, swaggering men with pinched faces, and trousers big round the bottom, who looked too much at the girls. One night there was an argument about that, in the Grand Café of the Sea. Some one passed the fighting-word; but before anybody could move those two had pulled out revolvers. Revolvers! *Mah!* . . . The carabinieri gave them till the next boat to go.

"But meanwhile, the other Signuri, whose villa was scarcely dry, packed up in all haste and ran away to Sicily. He didn't even wait for the steamer. He hired Ilario to take him.

"In the village, they said he'd seen the Old Ones at last. Eh! You and I, Signuri, know what the Old Ones amount to! It wasn't ghosts that sent him off. It was Nino, and his two little friends of the Camorra.

"To-day it begins all over again. Nino smells money in the house once more. He crawls up to hide behind the cactus, and learn our habits. Presently, he'll write another letter to Naples. Before that happens, I certainly ought to kill him."

The young man's handsome, bronzed face turned pensive.

"As for the body— The troublesome part of it is, he has the best of us there. If he kills any of us, he

can leave us lying. Every one would say it was old Ilario trying to pay off his score. Even if it should be you, Signuri, instead of me. Or the Signura, instead of Fannia. The old are all bunglers, you know. When they meddle with such matters, people aren't surprised at their mistakes.

"On the other hand, if I kill him, I shall have to do something with him afterward. . . . *Tch!* No matter. One thing at a time. The main point is, to get him before he writes. It was a bad blunder that I made down there, just now. Half a second sooner would have put him into Purgatory. What a pity!"

He shrugged—a gesture of mournful resignation—as Sebastian remarked:

"Especially since his letter's already written."

Annibale stepped back.

"What do you say!"

"It was written and posted night before last."

"Who says that!"

"And it will go by to-morrow's boat. Unless one explained matters to the carabinieri?"

"To the carabinieri! *Cuspettu!* What human being tells his business to the police? Men do for themselves."

Sebastian nodded. He knew that in Sicily, and the islands round it, nearly every man of the lower classes was allied with the Mafia—an organization not primarily criminal, but sustained, to baffle the authorities, by a population which considers that individual redressal of wrongs is necessary to manhood. In Annibale's words he found merely an expression of this racial idea. He responded:

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"I'm inclined to agree with you."

"Naturally! For those who can't protect themselves aren't worthy to live. *La giustizia è per la fissa*—the law is for the weak! Not for you and me, Signuri! That sees itself with half an eye."

"Good man. However, one might possibly corrupt the postmaster?"

"No chance. He is my enemy on account of Fannia, whom he wanted to marry. I am your servant. So you're his enemy, also."

"Money works wonders."

"He'd take your money and tell Nino. Nino would only write another letter. No, Signuri: the thing's done, that's all. In a little while we'll have two or three Ninos to dispose of, instead of one. There it is, in a nutshell."

"Very well. Then we stand together, do we?"

"Certainly."

"In whatever happens?"

"In whatever happens."

"A bargain."

By way of reply, the young man licked his thumb.

"Why that?"

"That? In Turrigianti we seal our contracts so."

"Curious. It happens to be an old Moorish custom."

"True? No doubt they got it from us, one time or other. . . ."

Sebastian and Annibale returned to the summit.

From the thickets behind the villa Fannia appeared, walking slowly, her dress in ravellings round

her stout, bare ankles, her shoulders bowed beneath a bundle of fagots. Sebastian looked thoughtfully at that shape which should have earned respite, by this time, from such burden-bearing. When she had entered the house:

"Annibale, from now on no more heavy work for Fannia."

The young man's face flushed scarlet.

"God forgive me! I try to remember. But this morning we've had other things to think of. You're good to remind me, Signuri."

Sebastian shrugged impatiently.

"I want this event to be as quickly over with as possible. In warfare, invalids are an encumbrance. Have you any idea when our garrison will be—reinforced?"

Annibale looked blank:

"*Ma cu sapi*—who knows? Up here, one loses track of time. But soon, I think."

He reflected. A proud smile appeared.

"I shall call him Ercole, because he'll be afraid of nothing."

"Felicitations. But how do you know that Hercules was afraid of nothing?"

"Eh, there's a tradition in Turrigianti to that effect, Signuri. Once upon a time, as I understand, he was one of us. But you've heard of him yourself, it seems?"

"Something or other. . . . I suppose there's no doctor in the village?"

"Oh, no. But old Maria, of the parish-house, usu-

ally attends to family affairs. Still, I doubt if she'd come up here."

"I'll have a word with her next time I'm down. Do you think of anything else that needs doing?"

Annibale looked embarrassed.

"If I might ask," he stammered. "A few lengths of woollen stuff? You could take it out of my wages."

"Clothing?"

"Not necessary, Signuri. She's been making little shirts out of an old sheet."

Sebastian gazed at him almost quizzically.

"No more luxuries, then?"

"Nothing reasonable."

"Well, what that's unreasonable?"

The young man grinned sheepishly.

"Eh! You know them, Signuri, these women! The silly fancies they get! What don't they think of, and whine for, day in and out! Imagine! Sweet lemons!"

"Sweet lemons?"

"Eh! For a month and more she's said, every day, morning, noon, and night, 'If only I could eat a sweet lemon.' *Sanguinacciu!* Children, that's what they are, after all! Sweet lemons!"

"Where do they grow?"

"Body of Bacchus, at the other end of the island! On a tree by the hermit's hut! With all the village between! When they pick out something to set their hearts on, they take good care to choose the impossible!"



"I see you're a bit of a philosopher."

"I'm as God made me, Signuri."

"We won't argue that. . . . *Arrividienci*, Annibale. I leave you here in charge."

Sebastian set out for the northern cliffs.

He found the path through the brush wellnigh obliterated by the storm. The interlaced branches, the knotted vines and brambles, the great masses of cactus and the agave-clumps that forced their way upward through the tangle, gave him cause for apprehensions. These dense coverts encroached too closely on the house. A small army could easily have made an ambush from them.

Forcing his way through, at length he stood on the northern precipice. Nearly three hundred feet below, deep swells, slate-gray under arabesques of foam, were rolling in diagonally, to break against the rock with long, thunderous crashes.

"The Old Ones must be in exceptionally good voice to-day! . . ."

He took the cliff-path eastward, toward the Doric temple.

The sun had reached the little glade, to light the flower-crowned roof and lichen-covered walls. But the narrow doorway still yawned shadowy and cold. And when he approached, the sound that was like titanic voices rose to a ghastly clamor—as of giants howling, hooting, groaning, in a frenzy of impotence and rage.

He entered, passed round the stone screen, struck a match, gently tried the pitfall with his foot, then,

in the dark, stood listening to the uproar. The place fascinated him. Somehow he felt at home in it.

But he soon came out, went on along the ledge-like path, and presently reached the platform. Here a tree, uprooted by the tempest, lay across the way. He tilted it on end. It disappeared, and finally plunged into the waves without a sound.

At last, the path, swerving upward, ended on the ridge above the village. Sebastian looked down, over groves and fields and vegetable-terraces, at that distant squalor.

From the back windows hung bed-quilts of faded red and yellow. Little dingy figures were moving round the garbage-heaps. The rows of drab houses were interrupted at intervals by vertical black fissures—the pestilential alley-ways that he had already explored. In and out of these dodged naked children and black pigs.

“That’s it: they live like swine! Now, suppose the cholera should drop in on Torregiante?”

The solitary hut, high on the easternmost promontory, caught his eye. He continued in that direction.

It was a tiny hovel, built of boulders, its crevices stuffed with moss, a slab of driftwood for a lintel, its roof of thatched boughs and prickly-pear leaves weighted down with stones. Close by, some wild olives spread their silvery foliage over marigolds, and the sweet-lemon tree let down its glistening fruit.

Sebastian approached the doorway. From the gloom issued a man’s voice, monotonously praying.

“*Padre?*”

The praying ceased.

"With your permission, a few of these sweet lemons?"

Finally, from the shadows, the calm reply:

"What you wish, Christian Soul."

"Many thanks."

"It is not I that you should thank."

Sebastian felt suddenly malicious.

"Sweet lemons, you know! A sensation that I'm not acquainted with!"

A pause. Then the voice, mysteriously tranquil:

"Try it, my brother. Perhaps it won't be the last. . . ."

The praying recommenced.

## CHAPTER XIV

As Sebastian descended through the woods, he heard a faint, melodious twittering. It was Little Paganni, seated amid his brown goats in the rocky clearing, playing on his flute of donax-reeds.

The beasts did not sense that stealthy approach sooner than the goatherd. When Sebastian revealed himself, Little Paganni was waiting motionless, flute in lap, sun-bleached curls tossed back, large eyes expectant. Before he recognized the other, his eyes looked gray; immediately after, though his face did not alter in the slightest, they were black. The stranger stood still, to appreciate fully the child's unusual beauty.

"Good-morning, Pan."

A slight frown crossed Little Paganni's amber brow.

"Good-morning, Signuri," he responded, gravely watchful.

"May one advance?"

"Accommodate yourself, Signuri."

"You're not afraid your goats' milk might go sour? Or that your nose might drop off, and your hair turn into caterpillars?"

"No, Signuri. With the money you gave me I bought this amulet against your evil eye."

He touched his small bare chest. Among the rags hung a pewter image of a hand, the index and little fingers extended.

"Then we can talk together, now, without danger?"

"Oh, yes, you can't harm me now," the child said. "Besides, it makes shivers up and down my back. I like to feel them."

"I salute you, Little Paganni, because you're brave."

"So I am." However, he became thoughtful. "All the same, if my father should catch me talking to you, I'd get a beating."

"And what has Big Paganni got against me, Little Paganni?"

"What has every one, for that matter? They say you're a magician, and that your wife's a siren. They found you in the sea, standing on the water; and she was singing to the fishes. Her feet were covered with gold, from walking on the bottom, among the wrecks of treasure-ships. And she had the tears of drowned men strung round her neck. Besides, you live with the Old Ones, and don't die of it. Can men do that?"

"Annibale and Fannia do."

"Because they're no longer Christians. They've refused the Sacraments of the Holy Church, and sold themselves to the Devil. That's why Fannia's baby will have horns on his head, and toes like goats'."

"How do you know so much of Fannia?"

"I hear my father and Nino arguing about it,

when I'm in bed, and the others kick me till I wake up. . . ."

He stopped, and looked away sullenly. Perhaps he remembered his training, the training of all Sicilian children of his class, to the effect that nothing which occurs within the family must ever be repeated. Sebastian made haste to change the subject:

"Ah. So you have brothers and sisters?"

The boy regarded Sebastian almost pityingly.

"Every one has brothers and sisters. Except magicians."

Sebastian sat down on the turf, and lighted a cigarette. The goats all stood staring at him, their bells silent, their chin-beards lowered, their eyes full of cunning.

"Tell me about your brothers and sisters, Little Paganni."

"Eh! What would there be to tell? There's Giacinta. She's four years old. Sometimes I bring her up here to sit with me. But I sha'n't do that now: I've no amulet for her to wear. . . . Then there's Felicità, the baby. She has scabs on her head. But last night we took her to kiss Saint Giosuè's bones; so the scabs will soon be cured. . . . And Taddio, my brother. But he's in Purgatory. . . . That's all there are, at present."

Sebastian laughed—a new sort of laugh for him. He checked himself, then remarked, carelessly:

"I have some sweet lemons in my pocket."

"So I see, Signuri."

"Would you care for one?"

Little Paganni reflected.

"If it came from anywhere else, I'd say no. But I don't think you could bewitch the hermit's lemons. Thank you, Signuri. I'll eat it with my dinner."

He unwrapped a riddled bandanna handkerchief, and in it carefully deposited the lemon, with the hunch of coarse bread, and two shrivelled little tomatoes, and the fragment of a garlic-clove. Sebastian, with half-shut eyes, nodding in æsthetic approval, watched the boy's lowered face, as the brown, elfin fingers delicately rearranged that frugal store of food.

"You never go home till evening, Little Paganni?"

"How could I? The goats must eat."

"And whom do they belong to, these seven noble reservoirs?"

"These— Oh, to the Syndic. He's rich. As you can see. But he also owns the Grand Café of the Sea."

"A personage, undoubtedly! At least, when you drive them down, you're free to go and play awhile?"

"Play! Play is for children, Signuri! When I drive them down, I take them through the village. The women hear the bells, and stick their heads out the windows, and call for me. I send the goats upstairs, and the women milk them, each as much as she wants, and let down the money in a basket."

"And sometimes cheat a bit?"

"*Pri Baccu*, they don't cheat me, Signuri! I know to a drop how much milk every one of these goats holds."

"Good. And when they've run dry, what then?"

"When they've run dry, we go home, and I lock them up in the café kitchen."

"Better still. And how does the Syndic reward you for all that—if it's fair to ask?"

"Eh, he pays my father something, now and then."

"I fancy, from what you tell me, that your pockets don't jingle much."

"Not very much, Signuri. . . . Some time ago, I found a two-soldi piece lying on the beach."

"No! Well, what dissipations followed?"

"I traded it with a friend of mine for his dog, that had just died."

"And when it was all your own, that dog?"

Into Little Paganni's eyes stole a sweet look, of retrospective happiness. He murmured:

"I bashed it with rocks till I was tired."

Sebastian's shoulders shook. He went into a fit of coughing over his cigarette. The goats, with a gambolade, dodged away.

"How old are you, Pan?"

"Six, Signuri."

"Oh, I think you must be some thousands of years older than that!"

The child's eyes dilated.

"You were certainly here before the village, or Saint Giosuè the Admiral, or even these trees. You and your flute and the goats. And you piped the same tunes. But had other listeners. Who hid in the leaves. Little shaggy boys with pointed ears and curly tails. Little transparent girls with long



wet hair full of water-weeds. Perhaps, even nowadays, if you played a bit better than usual, they'd still come to listen?"

Clutching his amulet, Pan sprang to his feet.

"Ai! For charity! Are you raising the Old Ones?"

"Not to-day. I'd prefer to tell you stories."

The boy peered long and earnestly at Sebastian, and at the encircling foliage. He fixed his gaze on the goats, to observe their demeanor. In the end he sat down again, with a deep sigh. His small chest stopped heaving. Gradually his eyes turned blue. After some moments, in a timid tone:

"What kind of stories?"

"Whatever you choose."

Little Paganni revolved this offer in mind, with side-glances at Sebastian. Nothing else could have so attracted and engrossed this child of a race attached passionately to the ancient amusement that tale-spinners afford. At last, clenching his fists, as if taking his courage in his hands, he whispered:

"I'd like to hear about the country of the magicians!"

The man nodded, leaned forward, elbows on knees, and assumed the age-old pose of the weaver of yarns. With a solemn mien, he began:

"The country of the magicians lies under the edge of the ocean. . . . A terrible place to see! Awful clatterings, and bangings, and roarings! Everywhere smoke, dust, and flashes! Where the houses plunge under the ground, and spring into the air, full of

threads that buzz with voices a thousand kilometers away, and the heat of burning trees that have been turned into stone, and lamps made out of lightning! Where the people leap from cellar to roof in a breath! Or go flying over the fields in a shower of sparks! Or soar in the air like birds! . . . There you have it, just as it is!"

Little Paganni shuddered.

"Holy Virgin forbid that I ever see it!"

"Right you are," Sebastian assented. "It's much better here."

He shook his head.

"But the people there do stranger things than those."

"*Davveru?*"

"A positive fact. Why, if you watched them awhile, even when they were only walking and sitting and talking, you'd know they're a crazy lot! For instance, those fellows all worship graven images that they've made themselves."

"You mean of Our Lady and the Blessed Saints?"

"Not at all. Of a big booby called My Neighbor's Tongue."

"Then they're heretics!"

"I believe you. And you couldn't imagine the antics they go through while they worship him! I'll tell you: they stand on their heads! They think it absolutely necessary that he should always see them upside down. Capers, but they're afraid of him, Little Paganni!"

"But what could he do to them?"

"Everything. Because, when they made him, for the finishing touch they clapped all their own brains under his crown. He can make them cry with people they want to laugh at, and laugh with others whose throats they'd like to cut. He can make them kill a man for something they're tired of, or kiss the hand that gave them a blow. He can make them hang themselves when they'd much rather not, or die of shame when there's nothing to be ashamed of. Or run away and hide forever, if once he's caught them standing right-side up. . . .

"As for amusement, one of their favorite games is to go stumbling round in crowds, with bandages over their eyes, yelling at everybody who hasn't put one on, 'You're blind!'"

Little Paganni uttered a startled giggle. That game appealed to the keen sense of irony innate in him.

"That *Gesù* may pardon them! They're mad, for sure, those men! And their children, too, I suppose?"

"Oh, their children soon catch the trick. One might almost say they were born standing on their heads."

"And the women, of course?"

"Why, of course?"

The boy pursed up his cupid's-bow mouth in a highly sophisticated way.

"In Turrigianti, I know, the women are just as their husbands tell them to be."

"Now it's you who amaze me, Little Paganni!"

"But naturally! If they weren't, we men must beat them with clubs and lock them up in the cellar. Then they mind. Why not? The women are made like that."

"May I ask how long you've been married yourself?"

"I'm not yet married, Signuri. But what of that? I often see— One has neighbors in Turrigianti—*eccu!* Now and then one sees a man beating his wife. Then, when she's cried, she likes him much more than before. The club stands behind the door—I mean to say, that's the custom, Signuri. So one won't have to hunt far for it, when he needs it. He might pick up something else in his hurry—say a knife. . . . Old Ilario's wife, before she died, had a long scar down her cheek—so. But she thought a lot more of him after that. . . . That's the way with them, Signuri. At least, in Turrigianti."

"In Torregiante. . . . But off there, under the edge of the sea, the women, as well as the men, can be curious creatures. . . ."

The goats, returned to their grazing, moved slowly over the grass, with bells softly jingling. Here and there, white butterflies were hovering over crimson sainfoin. The wind had died away. All the leaves stood still against a brilliant sky. Above the tree-tops, the western headland towered, wrapped in a yellow mist of rain returning on the sunbeams to its source. Midst an immaterial-looking film of green, the roof of the villa trembled indistinctly. It was like an impalpable place, about to dissolve into the

golden vapors enveloping it—a place housing something too rare to be perceived more clearly, or understood, or attained. . . .

Sebastian stood up, searched his pockets, and tossed the boy three broad coppers.

“Do you know what these are for?”

“To spend, perhaps?”

“To buy sister Giacinta an amulet. Then you can still bring her up here, sometimes, for company?”

The small face brightened.

“But my amulet only cost five soldi.”

“Squander the other one on yourself.”

“So I will! . . .”

“Little Paganni, would you care to shake hands?”

The child considered the man, then averted his eyes, and blushed.

“I’d rather not, Signuri.”

“What! You’re beginning to doubt the virtues of your charm?”

Interlocking his fingers tight, Little Paganni repeated, nervously:

“I’d rather not.”

Sebastian turned away.

“Good-by, Pan.”

“Good-by, Signuri.”

But he had nearly reached the village before he thought again of the house on the headland. . . .

Up there, in the portico, Ghirlaine was still sitting, her eyes on the western horizon.

She felt that life was opening out before her once more—but in how unfathomable a form! She would

go on living, because she had found the one weapon from which his ruthlessness shrunk back: but beyond this fact imagination could not extend. Of one thing more, however, she was sure. With rescue would come revenge. And now she thirsted for revenge no less intensely than for rescue.

Not only had he plunged her into these horrors, and brought those she loved to anguish—the consequences were bound to be terrible. What would the world believe and say? In what position would she find herself on her return to it? What was impending for that career of hers, which had developed so triumphantly up to this moment, wherein she had felt such pride and certainty, which had nearly reached its finest hour when this calamity, like a bolt from the blue, struck her down?

Things could never be the same again. About her innocence would always cling the contamination of this outrage. The wrong he had done her could not be expiated by his death.

Yet she desired his death, with a fury such as she had never known before. Or, better even than death, his life, as he would have to live it, if he drew off from this adventure with a whole skin.

For to all who had tolerated him thus far, this would be the last straw! Where could he show himself hereafter? He would have to slink in the corners of the earth where the most shameful outcasts of society gather—those who have had much, but have lost it all, yet go on existing, in places one never hears of, in communities of unspeakable ignominy

and unhappiness, always cursing the world that sickened of them, always thinking of the crimes they committed and the price they paid. . . . Yes, she wanted him to live for that!

The hatred she had felt for him up there, or even in her first hours here, was a little thing compared to the hatred of this hour of virtual victory. It seemed to have needed the gradual influence of these surroundings to bring forth in her heart such fierce emotion. She was not that girl of gracious calmness and dignity who, but a little while before, had passed superbly through the Roman season. She was not the maiden, suddenly appealing, dependent, stirred by a new, strange warmth, who had said "*à bientôt*," in the palm-gallery of the Palazzo Campobasso, to Vincent Pamfort. She was another creature, capable of elemental impulses and deeds. Last night, she could have killed herself. To-day, she could hope that another might not die and cheat her of the thought that he was living on in torment.

Would Vincent Pamfort have recognized her now? . . . As for that, what would Vincent do, when everything was known?

She told herself that she could count on him forever. But deep in her heart she felt a sickening despair.

It was not that she doubted Vincent's loyalty. His nature was too fine, she protested, to hesitate even at such a trial. But she feared the power of the world about him, that he had always known and lived with, and that she would have to live with, if

they still married. She knew the rigid respectability of the old county aristocracy of England, its instinctive revulsion from everything in life that even bordered on extravagance, its uncompromising hostility to the *crime passionnel* and everybody involved in it. They would not see her through Vincent's eyes, those others! In their minds would always lurk an exultant suspicion, doubly persistent because she was a foreigner. This hour might pass, but as long as she lived men and women would take good care to keep its ghost in evidence. And such a ghost, to haunt that old, illustrious country-seat, and cast its shadow on them year after year, and some day appear before their children! . . .

An inarticulate cry burst from her. And, somewhere in the house, another voice seemed to echo hers, with just such a moan of suffering?

Springing up, she began to pace the portico.

"What have I done, that this should come to me, too!"

For she saw that, however faithful Vincent Pamfort might be, she could never submit his future to that torture, which he would feel every hour, which those among whom he was bound to live would never for one hour let him forget.

She knew him so well—he was so transparently honest and simple-hearted. If faithfulness and devotion to duty were bred in his every fibre, there also existed in him an intense, hereditary conventionality. If, in the test of the future, his love for her, and his sense of duty, should triumph, that triumph would wreck his life.



"No, no; he must never even be allowed that choice! . . . That's it—I must never see him again."

And, standing still, her eyes on the western sea, she repeated:

"Whatever happens, I must never see him again. . . ."

Tears running down her cheeks, she stretched out her arms to the west, and murmured, in a voice choked with sobs:

"Good-by. . . . Good-by. . . ."

Ah, to go back six months! To find round her all that had irked her so, up there! To breathe the hot perfumed air that had so stifled her! To regain that environment which she had hated, and longed to flee from!

Yes, she had longed to leave all that behind! And how cruelly had her wish been granted!

Pacing to and fro, she hugged her shoulders, as if to prevent her heart from breaking. Her fingers tore at the coarse tissue of her dress, the peasant-dress, clothing that exquisite body which till now had never known such fabrics. Surely, this masquerade completed the hideous joke that Fate had played on her.

"But why! . . ."

From within the house, a faint moan responded:

"*Madonnina. . . . Madonnina. . . .*"

She stood still, listened, went to the door. It was Fannia's voice.

Ghirlaine entered the house. In the corridor, she found the girl leaning against the wall, half-way to her room, but unable to go on. Through the gloom,

her face, ordinarily so vivid, appeared a patch of yellowish-white. Her mouth remained open. Her black eyes were wide and blank with panic.

"Ah, Signura. . . . Ah, Signura. . . ."

"What has happened? What is it?"

In the incomprehensible tongue:

"*Sugnu malatu! . . . Misericordia! . . . Non vogghiu morire. . . .*"

Suddenly Ghirlaine understood. She held up that sinking form.

"Come. Lean on me. Courage!"

"*Si, si. Curragiu. . . .*"

At last, the one bending beneath the other's weight, they gained Fannia's room. The peasant sank back upon the pallet spread with goatskins, and twisted her rough hands together.

"*Non vogghiu morire. . . . Non vogghiu morire. . . .*"

Ghirlaine understood, if not the words, at least the thought. "I don't want to die!" The universal cry, impelled by terror of the mystery that was approaching.

And the witness of this anguish felt an immense ignorance, and helplessness, that made her flush with shame. At such a moment, before so vital, so elemental a test of worth, to feel herself lacking in all necessary power!

A sharp call, like the call of a suffering animal to its mate:

"Annibale!"

Ghirlaine sped into the corridor, through the door, out to the portico.

"Annibale! Annibale!"

A crashing of bushes on the eastern slope. He breasted the hilltop, running toward her, rifle half raised.

"Signura!"

He darted into the house. She followed him.

In the dim room, he dropped to his knees beside the pallet. There was a volley of exclamations, spasmodic, interrupted by sobs. At the word "Maria," Fannia seized him convulsively by the arms. Her face was distorted by a new terror.

He struggled to free himself. Evidently, he wanted to rush off somewhere, and fetch some one. But the girl clung to him desperately, while uttering long wails of passionate refusal.

And in her wide eyes her fear for him eclipsed the other fear.

*"Non fa niente! Eccu! Sugnu beni, Annibale! Eccu! Sugnu beni! . . . It's nothing. I'm well again. . . ."*

Then the thought of his passing down through the village, among the knives of mortal enemies, achieved a miracle. Her lips quivered. Her body stiffened. And finally her set mouth revealed for him the brave travesty of a smile.

"It's nothing. See, it's nothing. . . ."

So those two wild creatures stared into each other's faces, both ready to risk death for love.

On Ghirlaine this revelation acted as a spur. In her, too, something suitable to the hour, unprecedented, at once simple and majestic, was born and

immediately lived intensely. Abruptly she felt calm throughout, with the thrilling calmness of one who finds herself. She touched Annibale on the shoulder, pointed to Fannia and herself, and motioned him out.

The young man rose slowly to his feet, and gazed at her. What assurance did he read there, in that beautiful countenance? He left them together, the daughter of the great world and the daughter of the earth. And in Fannia's bare chamber the two joined their strength before that trial. . . .

The sun was declining, when Ghirlaine came out to the portico, at last, and called to Annibale. Her face was white; the violet-colored marks beneath her eyes were more intense. For she, too, had suffered, in her first contact with such suffering; and the final prostration of the other had found her nearly ready to succumb. When Annibale drew near, at first he could not speak for apprehension.

Then her voice reassured him. He went in, lifting his large, bare feet cautiously, hat in hand, as if into a church.

Fannia seemed not to have moved since he had left her. Her thick black hair was spread out over the pillow. Her arms lay nerveless. Her shape seemed sinking into the pallet, beneath a coverlid of intricate crochet-work—the *coperta del letto matrimoniale*, her wedding counterpane, that she had begun to make when she was twelve years old. At their entrance, her head did not turn, her body did not stir. But very slowly her eyes rolled in their sockets, and

achieved one of those side-glances for which women's heads are made. Two great drops welled up between her eyelids, and rolled down to her ears. And her voice, so deep and resonant formerly, uttered the faintest sigh:

*"Ecculu. . . . Look at him!"*

Then one made out, nestling close under her arm, a little, purplish round face upturned.

Annibale let fall his hat, and fearsomely drew near. He bent forward gradually, as if ready to spring back. His jaw hung down. For a time, he gaped at that stupendous son of his, and at the wonderful mother.

In the end, he turned to Ghirlaine. His deep chest swelled out. He wanted to speak, even though she might not understand the words. But he could only raise his shoulders, with his eyes, in one huge, eloquent shrug. Suddenly, with a thump, he went down on his knees before her, snatched her hands, and covered them with voracious kisses.

*"Ah! Signura!"*

His outburst was volcanic. His frame shook: tears rained down upon her fingers. And there were tears in her eyes, also.

Out of doors, she walked down through the flowers to the brink, and looked across the sparkling water.

She was moved by this event. Her intimate contact with it had produced in her an unprecedented awe. The fact, and all the crude emotions that had caused it, seemed somehow marvellously ennobled by these pains and tears, by these impulses of sacrifice and gratitude.

She was glad to have been drawn into that drama, to have played her part in it. Perhaps, she thought, not knowing the vast physical difference between that savage girl indoors and the women of her world, perhaps she was even responsible for the present existence of two human beings—for the future interplay of three affections?

It was an inspiring sensation—that feeling of intense personal significance, for life or death, for grief or happiness! . . .

The humble appeared to her in a new light, almost as part of herself: and she greeted this idea with a certain half-unconscious pride. Those ragged sweethearts, who had chosen their own way despite the opinion of their little world, were changed, at that moment, into figures more heroic than all the heroes she had known. For a flash, she glimpsed then the grandeur of the primitive, the natural, the untrammelled, when moved by mutual love. It was a vast stretch of space, indeed, that opened out before her now—a vista as far-reaching as the western sky between the flushing clouds, and no less blinding, to her unaccustomed sight. . . .

A step sounded behind her on the pavement of the portico. It was Sebastian, returned from the village.

He stopped to stare at her in surprise. Then he went on, with resonant footfalls, toward the door.

“Wait!”

She came toward him, and put her finger to her lips.

“Go quietly. There are three in there.”

As she stood amid the tangled flowers, outlined against the sun, her figure enveloped as by a nimbus, her hair a flaming aureole, she looked like a young Sibyl, whose grave eyes contain unfathomable secrets.

## CHAPTER XV

FOR Torregiante, steam-ship day was always a sort of *festa*. The fishermen stayed home. The farmers forbore to work their vegetable-patches. Round noon, all the village gathered at the shore.

The esplanade, sloping down gently to the beach, was paved with broad blocks of stone. The crevices were wedged at intervals with iron rings, to which the sail-boats, when they had been hauled up on rollers, could be lashed fast. To-day, the water-front was all encumbered with these rough craft, short-masted, hog-backed, reeking with tar and fish.

Among the bulging hulls of faded blue, booths had sprung up at random. Their miserable wares were screened from the fierce sun by scraps of sail-cloth. Here and there, over a brazier, a ragamuffin fried mysterious chunks of offal dipped in batter, or, between ear-splitting howls, turned out waffles of flour-and-water paste strewn sparingly with cardamon seeds.

On the black sand glistening with mica, thin-legged boys were rolling up the dark-brown nets. The girls, their arms entwined, interrupted this business mischievously, admired the pinchbeck ornaments exposed for sale, or blushed as young men slipped by them with a whisper. Rugged solemn fellows, with bundles of live chickens slung over their shoulders



upside down, gathered to lose their pennies and their voices at the ancient game of "flash the fingers." The mothers, their latest brats dragging down their hair, screamed threats at the five-year-olds, who pelted one another with fish-heads and tumbled into puddles.

But the village elders held themselves aloof from all this stridence. With an air of supreme disillusionment, they sat before the Grand Café of the Sea, round the tunnel-like doorways surmounted by gaudy prints of the Madonna, beneath the loggias garnished with bunches of dry onions, peppers, and tomatoes. For their part, they had seen the ship come in too many years to get excited—but not often enough to go about their business when it was expected.

Toward one o'clock, considerably behind-time as usual, the steam-boat crept round the western headland, trailing a dun-colored plume of smoke.

All eyes turned toward the little vessel, grimy, snub-nosed, apparently almost overbalanced by its frowsy superstructure, rolling from side to side even in that calm sea. Rowing-boats put out from shore. A hundred yards off the beach, a bell jingled: the steamer showed its broadside and stood still. Into a rowing-boat dropped a white-and-red striped mail-bag. Some men scrambled down the ladder. On the deck, a few lads in jerseys were tugging at crates and boxes.

Sebastian, watching at the water's edge, found the Marshal of carabineers beside him.

"No doubt there are letters for your Excellency in that bag!"

"So I hope. And other things in those boxes."

"Then your Excellency is really planning to stay on?"

"For a while. It's charming, the Place-Up-There."

"And the Signora?"

"Improving famously."

"Good news!" The *Maresciallo's* face, which had been slightly wistful while turned toward the ship, beamed with enthusiasm.

"Pray recommend me to her Excellency, Signore. Though no doubt an angel—saving your Excellency's presence—would have just as much use as she for the services of a carabineer!"

"Who knows?" Sebastian responded, calmly. "At any rate, it will please her to give you a glass of wine some day, when you feel like climbing to our perch."

"A thousand thanks!" But the soldier added, laughing: "You'll have to warn Annibale that it's a peaceful visit."

"He'll be glad to see even you. He's dying to exhibit his baby."

"What! The baby's arrived? *Magari!* Time does pass, then, in Torregiante, after all!"

The priest joined them, frail and pallid in his greenish cassock, his kindly eyes shaded by his unkempt beaver hat, his long, thin mouth trembling in a smile.

"Yes," he admitted, glancing out at the steamer, "I, also. Even we veterans, between our tasks, like to contemplate the links that bind us to the past. But that link, there, binds some to the future also—eh, *Signor Maresciallo?*"

"A fact, Don Vigilio," the soldier cried, heartily. "My men and I will be relieved in the Autumn."

"And you, *Padre?*" asked Sebastian.

Don Vigilio shrugged, and smiled more gently.

"If I steal such moments as these, at least that doesn't mean I'm homesick. In this life each has his special work to do. Once on a time, I thought mine lay out there. But my superiors, nearer the source of inspiration than I, knew better. Now I realize that it lies here."

He nodded several times.

"Torregiante, a little world in itself. Why, I have much more than I deserve, of honorable responsibility!"

He spoke pure Italian, with that inimitable accent which is only obtained by long residence in Rome. And Sebastian, looking at that meek, worn old face, reflected: "Here's another, it seems, who might have his little tale to tell?"

But close at hand a voice roared out:

"If my wine's not aboard, Blood of Bacchus, but I'll have somebody's skin!"

It was a fat, bow-legged, sanguinary fellow of middle age, with protruding eyes, and the mustache of a walrus. He wore no collar. His big paunch was covered with a stained plaid waistcoat of moth-eaten

plush. His sausage-like fingers were congested by cheap rings. Evidently, the sound of his voice in anger gave him a certain pleasure. For, without preamble, he bellowed at the trio:

"I ask you, how is a man to run a wine-shop without wine? But do they consider that, those lazy devils at Trapani? Dirty foreigners! Accidents to them! May an apoplexy strike them! May the cholera take them off! May they die in a prison!"

He whirled round on some deck-hands from the steamer, who had landed near by.

"Tell them that next time I go to Trapani the way I'll yell in their office will shake the plaster off the walls!"

It was the Syndic.

When he had almost stopped snorting, Don Vigilio introduced Sebastian. The two shook hands, and crossed glances. Abruptly, the Syndic lost his bluster, raised his shoulders with a grin, and uttered, in a confidential, somewhat apologetic tone:

"Eh, Signuri! As you know, one has to bellow, and promise death and destruction, to get anything in this world!"

"I perceive you have the secret of authority in your pocket."

"*Già!* It's the only way to manage folks—to bully them."

"It would be folly to argue with a man whose theories have brought him to the pinnacle of success."

The Syndic's visage was dangerously congested by a blush of pride. But he felt called upon to protest:

"Oh, Signuri! Turrigianti—a small spot, after all! I know; for I, too, have travelled. To Trapani, to Palermo, even to Messina!"

"Cæsar would rather have been first in a village than second at Rome."

"Please?" the Syndic requested, blankly.

A new voice remarked, with eager obsequiousness:

"Our brave Syndic loses little by not recalling him. The object of education—I speak now of such of its ramifications as history, art, letters, *et cetera*—is to teach us what to forget."

Sebastian stared at the speaker. He saw a young man of excessive thinness, with a cadaverous face at once puerile, vain, and untrustworthy. This individual wore a purplish, threadbare suit, of the cut affected by cheap Palermo dandies. His cravat of green satin, considerably soiled and frayed, held an imitation emerald. With his thin mustache, pointed nose, and beady eyes, he looked like a starving rat.

"A nice way," protested Don Vigilio, good-naturedly, "for our school-master to talk!"

The new-comer made a gesture with his cigarette, which, as it was probably the only one he had, was not afire, but worn, so to speak, merely to give him an additional touch of elegance.

"But why not? We live in houses that were built too long ago to suit us, that we can't breathe in, that cramp our lives. For we're a different sort, at last, we of this age! So let's knock down the rubbish, and forget it! Let's build our house on fresh foundations!"

"My son," said the old priest, almost sternly,

"there is only one safe foundation, and it endures forever."

The young man stopped looking at Sebastian as if anxious for approval. With the extreme politeness of veiled impudence, he answered:

"Ah, *Padre*, I'm of the Government; you're the Church: so we might set the Vatican and the Quirinal an example of harmony! But pardon me: I expect a book by this steamer."

"And I some letters," said Sebastian, waking from his amusement.

"Nothing for you, Excellency," the school-master informed him, promptly. "I've just glanced over the mail."

"Nor boxes, either," volunteered the Marshal, returning from a look at the goods piled upon the sand.

"Nothing? Another fortnight, then. . . ."

But Sebastian took the path to the villa very thoughtfully.

It was not like Disnisius to be remiss. Suppose the whole affair was known already, and he had been forced to slip away in haste? But in that case he would surely have sent a warning? Or come to stand by his master?

Two weeks more of suspense. And then? . . .

At the foot of the hill, Sebastian met Nino descending.

The youth halted, checked an involuntary movement, and stood aside. Sebastian stopped to look down into that crooked face.

"Good-day, Nino."

"Good-day, Signuri," the ex-apprentice to the Camorra answered, in stifled voice.

"Been visiting Annibale?"

"Annibale and I don't visit. I've been hunting in the woods for medicine—for vermouthe and mastic. But I found none."

"That's unfortunate, Nino. For you look far from well."

The youth raised his eyes quickly, then dropped them. His nostrils expanded and turned pale.

"You look far from well," Sebastian repeated, softly. "You look to me as if you were on the verge of falling dangerously ill. . . . God keep you well, Nino."

He turned his back on the other, and mounted to the summit.

Ghirlaine was sitting in the portico, as always, facing the western sea. He went to her, and said:

"The things I ordered for you didn't come."

She looked at him with a slow, strange smile, cold, subtly terrible, like the smile of a Medusa.

"It hardly matters, I think," she answered, in a way to make him feel the triviality of his words. And he realized, with a shock, that she was human enough, after all, for certain fierce emotions. She was counting the days until his punishment. . . .

But his punishment had begun already.

Through the silence of that hilltop, she moved like the phantom of something inexpressibly remote. Every morning this feeling came to him, as he

watched her drifting among the flowers of the terrace. She stooped, with a flowing grace that made him catch his breath, to let the roses brush her cheek, as if listening to messages that the wind had brought them from afar. She touched the asphodels with her long, curving fingers in caresses full of secret meaning. Or, standing erect, her exquisite, tall form outlined against the sky, she gazed across the water, for a long time motionless, wrapped in thoughts that he could never share or understand. Then, at last, she turned, with the face of one back from a long journey, and, going slowly to the villa, passed him as if he were not there.

He thought, "She is thinking of him." And he fell to wondering whether she was, really, as she had always shown herself to him—a creature uninflamable, or, at least, as yet without the premonitory warmth that leads to passion. Her hours with the other, what growing fervors, what beginnings of self-abandonment, had they contained? He pictured such scenes, in anguish, yet driven to contemplate them despite all efforts of his will. The other! Though he was far away, Sebastian felt that somehow he was here with her, that the remembrance of her hours with him supported her, that it was the thought and hope of him which kept her in this miraculous calmness. . . .

Her face had altered. It had grown more ethereal in suffering, even rarer and purer than before. At times she seemed wellnigh a supernatural thing, a half-impalpable personification of spiritual beauty.



Bereft of those intricate and fashionable adornments, that had added to her charms, up there, the attraction of a certain worldliness, she appeared marvelously simplified, and in consequence even more remote from him. He felt like one who has entrapped a being of another world, only to see her dissolve into thin air before his eyes. But because no man on earth can find courage to give up his most precious ideal, Sebastian could not, even now, bring himself to think of giving up this living ideal so poignantly enriched, this phantasm of unattainable felicity. . . .

Yet, at the other's touch, she had not so dissolved!

He pondered his rival's personality. He could imagine its elements. And he began to glimpse, now, a fact that he, for all his long scrutiny of human nature, had not had occasion to perceive before—that between man and woman there can be no union of the heart till one has nearly attained the spiritual level of the other.

So, for the first time in his career, he commenced to understand what retribution Life may visit on long, persistent enmity to its intentions. . . .

Sometimes, while he was revolving such ideas in his mind, she came out on the portico with Fannia's baby in her arms. The little figure, strapped to a board, wrapped tight in swaddling-clothes, was sheltered by her white arms against her perfect breast. Then, if she did not think of him, suddenly all her remoteness vanished. She became a concrete being, intensely human. Holding the tiny, fat head against her

shoulder, she whispered till the vague eyes rolled round to fix themselves on hers. Then she put her face forward, with a sort of thirsty eagerness, smiled with a shiver, and pressed her lips against the dimpled neck. But if she saw Sebastian watching, her face changed instantly. The warmth left her. Her personality seemed to shred away, and leave the phantom. She turned, and carried the baby in to Fannia.

Soon the peasant-girl sat knitting in the sunshine all day long. Now and then, she let fall the needles, while her gaze followed Ghirlaine in dumb adoration. Often they were together among the flowers, beneath the lemon-tree laden with its pale fruit. At intervals, softly they exchanged words and sentences, which Ghirlaine repeated many times, with improving accent.

When Fannia nursed her baby, the other gazed raptly at the little eager mouth, the helpless hands always closing and unclosing. With an impulsive movement, she touched the baby's cheek. Fannia laughed, a deep-chested laugh of frank enjoyment and returning health. Then they were both silent, watching the small glutton, while the bees buzzed round them, and blue butterflies hovered in a cloud against the bluer sky.

Annibale brought in fagots, fetched the water, cooked the food. He tended his vegetable-patch, gathered wild asparagus and Arabian rose-artichokes, picked a mess of snails from the grape-vines, trapped birds, produced every day some edible novelty.

Often he came home with a mullet, a crayfish or two, a hatful of sea-urchins, or a young octopus which he stewed in oil, garlic, and tomatoes. It turned out that near the caves he had some cane lobster-pots, and nets of agave-fibre—though that any one should be able to climb up and down the northern cliffs seemed incredible. Annibale did so, however, without any thought of danger. And when his tasks were finished, he had time to prowls by the hour, over the hillside, on his own affairs.

But every evening, he sat on the edge of the porch, and talked to Sebastian about his offspring.

"But truly, Signuri, he knows me perfectly! Whenever I stand over him, he blows a little bubble. Which he does for nobody else! *Eccu!* It's a sign between us. We're comrades already. Soon I shall begin to teach him things."

"For instance," said Sebastian, his mind elsewhere.

"To catch fish and birds, to climb the rocks, not to step on vipers, to open a knife with one hand, to deceive people who ask questions, to mistrust the law. Eh, he shall grow up to be a man, my little Ercole!"

Across the terrace, Ghirlaine and Fannia had their heads together over the object of these plans. He was bawling his best.

Between howls, the words, in Ghirlaine's ever-better Sicilian:

"*U pozzu pigghiari*—may I take him?"

"Please, Signura."

Ghirlaine gathered the baby quickly to her bosom. In a moment he stopped crying.

"Ah," exclaimed Annibale, softly, "she's an angel of this world, our Signura! . . . What a pity. . . ."

"Well?"

"Nothing, Signuri."

He sighed, got up, and took the coil of fibre rope which he always seemed to have at hand, of late.

"What are you doing with those nooses, Annibale?"

"These, Signuri? But I hardly know myself. Yet the other day it seemed to me that I saw—saving your presence—a pig from the village rooting in the groves. So I thought, *pri Baccu*, if he's as foolish as that, that pig, why not profit by it?"

He went down the hillside. His bare feet made no sound. . . .

One perfect day succeeded another. The sky resembled deep-blue satin; the sea flashed like a noble jewel. Toward evening, the same gorgeous transformation of the world. Then the purple twilight, thick with golden stars.

Hot weather was approaching. All day the locusts sang in the pomegranate trees. Far below, on the slope behind the village, the men were working naked in their vegetable-patches. And the boatmen, slipping out at nightfall in their feluccas, sent over the water clear, wailing calls, that rose to the headland through the stillness.

But on that hilltop, despite the peaceful beauty of every hour, despite the continual recurrence of trivial words and simple occupations, they lived, and three of them knew they lived, on the brink of a volcano.

One morning, unexpectedly, there came a premonitory tremor.

The *Maresciallo* appeared, with two of his carabinieri. Before any one heard or saw them, they were on the terrace. They wore their fatigue-dress—short coats, flat caps, ankle-boots, and cartridge-boxes. But the climb had not disarranged the nattiness of their uniforms, or ruffled their habitual serenity. Sebastian noticed, however, that in addition to their revolvers, all carried carbines.

The Marshal smiled amiably.

"Where's Annibale, Signore?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"But not far away, I fancy? I have some questions to ask him. If you could break the news to him, so that he'd not get excited and lose his head, you'd be doing him a favor."

And the soldier showed all his teeth, beneath his large, blond mustache, in a sympathetic way.

At that moment, Annibale came round the corner of the house, and halted as if turned to stone.

The *Maresciallo* at once advanced on him jauntily. The two other carabinieri stepped quickly to one side, so as to keep both of Annibale's hands in view. But poor Annibale's expression of chagrin proclaimed, with sufficient frankness, that they had caught him unprepared. Then his face became almost half-witted in its blankness. He looked at the *Maresciallo* as if he had never seen a carabineer before.

"Annibale, where is Nino?"

"Nino!"

"Little Nino, with the crooked eyes."

"Where is he, you ask me?"

"That's what I ask you, Annibale."

"Nino? . . ."

"So I said."

"Eh. . . Is it a new joke, then, down there?"

"I'm not likely to climb up here, Annibale, just for a joke."

The other's face assumed a childish grin.

"*Daveru?* But so it would appear, all the same, if you make the climb to ask me where is Nino!"

"He's vanished from the village."

"So?"

"These three days."

"Capers! He goes and comes, does that fellow! Perhaps he's off to Naples again."

"By swimming, I suppose?"

"Who knows that? Or, maybe, when he was fishing with old Ilario, at night, he fell overboard? For sometimes old Ilario, as you must know, is rather hasty. . . . Or, if he had a little difference with some one, perhaps they rowed out and fought the duel of oars? But to ask me! Blood-pudding! News isn't made up here, *Signur Maresciallu!*"

The soldier, approaching his face close to Annibale's, retorted:

"All the same, you know what's become of him."

Annibale glanced at Sebastian, and shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"What can one say? It's a plot to arrest me, so

that old Ilario can stab me as they lead me through the village handcuffed."

"Don't be a fool, Annibale," remarked the Marshal. "Or pretend to take me for one."

"Then you're not going to arrest me?"

"Not yet. But when I find him——"

Annibale nodded solemnly.

"Find him, *Signur Maresciallu*, by all means. And arrest me or not, as you choose. What's Nino to me? Now, if it had been old Ilario!"

The Marshal turned to Sebastian.

"Always so. The last one of them is a *maffioso*! Still, we must make the inquiry. Now and then they give themselves away. Not often!"

"But surely——"

The soldier shook his head. While he still smiled with perfect amiability, his frank friendliness of other days had vanished. He would only say:

"We shall see, Signore. *A rivederla*."

"Some wine, at least?"

"Many thanks, not to-day. My respects to the Signora. *Arrividirchi*, Annibale."

"*Arrividirchi*, *Signur Maresciallu*."

The carabinieri departed. . . .

That evening, while Annibale was sitting on the edge of the porch, rocking his son in his arms, Sebastian asked him quietly:

"My friend, how did you dispose of Nino?"

The young man stopped his lullaby. He peered at Sebastian askance. Then, at last, his handsome face was twisted into a smile of almost boyish malicious-

ness. And, as he swayed the baby gently to and fro, he murmured:

"Signuri, I bestowed him on the Old Ones. . . ."

No more was said. . . . And Sebastian did not see the carabineers again till the next steam-boat day.

On that occasion, when he reached the harbor the ship, punctual for once, had already made its visit. But on the esplanade, half the village was clustered round a curious-looking stranger—a swarthy, bony creature, not tall but with enormous shoulders, clad in a red flannel undershirt and green cotton drawers ornamented with tattered galloons in yellow worsted. Posturing on a strip of carpet, he rattled a handful of metal rings, and shouted, while his eyes rolled idiotically:

"Now they're separate! Now I'll make them single! One! Two! Two and a half——"

His rolling eyes rested on Sebastian's face, then jumped to another.

"Three! *Ecco!*"

The rings jangled into a chain. The mountebank, with a whoop, set a peacock's feather on his nose, and ran round the circle, bawling:

"Impossible! Impossible! Impossible!"

He spoke with the Neapolitan accent.

At Sebastian's elbow popped up a broken-nosed fellow with the wreck of a guitar slung over his back. Thrusting forward a battered metal tray, he whined:

"Have charity on the poor jugglers!"

Sebastian tossed some coppers on the tray, appraised the two vagabonds at a glance, and went to



the water-front. He had no doubt that this was the result of Nino's letter.

"Rather clever, their make-up! They evidently have brains. Or the ones who sent them have."

On the sand, the Marshal saluted him with careful courtesy.

"Two trunks for you, Signore, in the Dogana."

"Good. And letters?"

"So I believe."

The carabineer touched his cocked hat again, and turned away. Sebastian reflected:

"What's the matter with him? It can hardly be his suspicion of Annibale?"

As he glanced toward the Grand Café of the Sea, to meet the stony stares of old Ilario, Big Paganni, and half a dozen more, he felt that no one was left in Torregiante village not secretly hostile to him. Save perhaps the priest?

In the Dogana, two steamer-trunks were waiting for him, corded and sealed. He bargained to have them carried half-way up the hill, where Annibale could find them. Then he went to the post-office.

A dirty young fellow, his mustache coquettishly curled, a rose stuck over his ear, admitted resentfully that there were letters.

Two were from Tunis. The first was written ostensibly by the Russian consular agent there. The second, well sealed, contained money, the trunk-keys, and Disnisius' note. Sebastian scanned it rapidly:

*Please excuse delays. Certain matters have made a great stir. Even when I reached Naples, there has been some one interested*

*of me, but not, I think, in regular authority. However so, I managed to show the heels: but time was taken thus. . . . Rest assured of yr Ex's scarf-pins. I go now to Balikisri, because yr Ex orders. But I was preferring to be with yr Ex in this moment. . . .*

"Stupid ass! He'd better prefer to save his skin," Sebastian muttered, with a feeling of half-contemptuous affection.

But he realized that he held another letter in his hand. It was addressed, like the rest, to "Saranin Schapposchnikoff." But it was postmarked "Roma!"

He ripped it open. The signature! "Ernesto Sangallo! . . ."

The words danced before his eyes. His surroundings turned black. From out of doors, the screech of the mountebank reached him faintly:

"Impossible! Impossible! Impossible! . . ."

Finally, he made out:

*My dear friend, one must really envy you the placidity of your retreat, so far from the social vortex, always revolving in its wild and futile repetitions. Though perhaps I should not say that. Because nothing, after all, is really futile.*

*Yes, the rigadoon goes on, though some of the dancers are missing. Princess Betty is in Baden-Baden. Don Livio is in London. There has been another plague of scurrilous anonymous letters in Rome. Tito has let his regiment go hang, and I understand he is travelling in Austria. I came back from Piedmont just too late to see him. I am sorry for that. However, things work out. . . .*

*Andreas Romanovitch you would hardly know, perhaps. Though to me he does not seem changed. But he never saw the Innocenti again! Now she is singing in Paris. Hector de*

*Chaumont is there, I think, on leave. But Mme. Berthe is going to spend the summer with little Donna Dora at the Braxazza stronghold in Umbria. Andreas has constituted himself their cavaliere servente. So, in analysis, there is good with less good, in Rome as in every fermentation. . . .*

*The Pincio and the Piazza Colonna are deserts. One sees nobody—except the sort of people who keep our country alive. . . .*

Sebastian sped through the remainder with pounding heart. Gossip! A jest or two! Even a graceful compliment! And nothing else!

No mention of Ghirlaine Bellamy.

Sangallo knew! Yet, in this notice that the sword was actually falling, the man could prattle, meander, touch every point except the vital one!

"So, even in him the old, ferocious playfulness of the arena-haunters crops out!"

What if they had arrived already, the rescuers?

He regained the villa in a daze. To Annibale:

"No visitors?"

"Visitors, Signuri!"

Fannia came out into the portico, the baby in her arms. Sebastian lowered his voice:

"My baggage is here. We have two rifles now. Load your own."

"It's always loaded, Signuri."

"No more people must catch us sitting round with empty hands."

"Ah. Nino's friends have arrived?"

"Nino's friends? Oh, yes. They've arrived."

He had forgotten them.

"We shall have others also, Annibale."

"The carabineers?"

"Them, too, without a doubt."

The young man answered steadily, but with a leaping eye:

"Very well, Signuri. We shall know how to receive as many and various as like to come, so the Madonna gives us wit."

He walked to the house, pinched his baby's cheek, and went in for his rifle.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE trunks were brought up next morning. Sebastian Maure's first care was to make sure of the Mauser rifle and the cartridges. His next was to assemble the things Disnisius had sent for Ghirlaine's use.

The rascal had not done badly! Indeed, Sebastian surmised that feminine advice, in Tunis or elsewhere, was responsible for his choice.

There were several dresses, of duck, blue serge, and linen, in excellent taste. There was even a simple evening-gown of rose-pink chiffon. Sebastian dug out a broad-brimmed straw hat trimmed with wheat and poppies, shoes of buckskin and tan, a green parasol, a quantity of white-silk stockings and *lingerie*. He found Paris scents and soaps, creams, powders, and dentifrice, nail-scissors and files, combs, brushes, hair-pins of yellow amber.

And mingled with all those dainty objects were boxes of Havana cigars, Turkish cigarettes in tins, a pair of binoculars, bottles of Irish whiskey, a tiffin-basket, a writing-case, potted truffles and caviare, the latest French novels. Grinning, despite himself, at that mixture of furbelows, refreshments, and ammunition, he thought:

"Devil take the fellow! He must have been undecided whether to pack for a picnic or a battle."

But his smile faded. To Fannia, who was gaping in through the window, he said, in a lifeless voice:

"Carry all this woman's stuff to the Signura. And to-night, when she's asleep, do away with those clothes she's been wearing. Throw them into the sea."

With his rifle and the binoculars he went down the hillside to relieve Annibale.

They had chosen, on the slope, a screen of agaves from which to watch the open ground about the village. In daytime, no one could ascend toward the headland, or make for the northern heights, without their perceiving him. But at night the problem grew complex. Then the sentinel had to lie on the roof, and scan the clearing about the house by starlight. At dawn, the adjacent thickets would have to be searched at the point of a gun.

If the priest came up, he was to advance in peace. The carabineers were to be received according to the hour, and their demeanor on setting out. Children, the favorite decoys in Sicilian warfare, were to pass to the top, their hails unanswered. If any others appeared, the plan was to shoot first and question afterward.

All the windows were covered, their shutters pierced by loop-holes. The doors were fitted with bars. The larder was stocked. The villa had become a fort.

Ghirlaine realized that a crisis was present. She had seen the steam-boat come in. She had thought of her post-card, and wondered if Sangallo might not

already be in Torregiante. But when Fannia began to bring into her room armfuls of new dresses, she abandoned this hope.

Then what had happened?

Fannia could tell her, or preferred to tell her, nothing. The peasant's handsome face was set in stony misery. To the questions that Ghirlaine put to her in halting Sicilian, Fannia merely raised her shoulders, rolled her eyes, and responded, heavily:

"Eh, this is men's business, Signura—may God forgive them!"

And she went about her work, her bare feet of a savage dragging over the tiles, her deep bosom heaving with sighs suppressed, her strong features changing, now and then, from apprehension to that dumb stoicism with which half-aboriginal women endure the feuds of their loved ones. At times, Ghirlaine heard her praying in her room, to the image of the Madonna. Afterward, her low brow would be smother.

"Don't fret yourself, Signura. It's our lot, that's all. Men must do their work in the world, and we ours. We're made to give life, and they to take it. Worry won't change the fact. . . ."

She added:

"As for that, if our men were different, we should have no use for them! For after all, it's because they're what they are that we care for them. To care for one of them, of course he must be *un omo*—a dare-devil. That's why I wouldn't have married the postmaster, even if there had been no Annibale.

A poor thing, for a fact, that postmaster! He'd have thought a long time, I'll warrant, before he'd have jabbed a knife into any one!"

Ghirlaine made a gesture of horror.

"And you mean to tell me it's such things that attract the women of these parts to men!"

"Eh! Is it different in other places, Holy Virgin! What else, then, should make us give ourselves to them? To know, when they put their hands upon us, 'This is one who would kill me, like a stroke of lightning, if I deceived him—who would kill any man that tried to take me from him!' Ai! For a fact, that makes us feel that we've got something worth while in our arms!"

Ghirlaine shuddered, but made no response. And Fannia mused:

"Still, one pays, at a time like this! . . ."

She took up the crying baby, rigid in his tight swaddling-clothes against the board, and calmly unfastened her ragged bodice.

"But if I worry too much he gets a colic. That's it! The men throw the stone, and the ripples spread and spread. . . ."

On the second afternoon of this new tenseness, Ghirlaine went out, and lost herself in the brush. She had never ventured so far before. But she felt the need of getting away from that house where terrible things seemed tottering to a crash.

In the end, she gained the northern cliffs. The path along the edge of the precipice tempted her. Without thought of danger, she followed it eastward.



It dipped toward the little valley that ran out to the brink. Amazed, she stared down at the Doric temple.

For the moment, she forgot everything save the beauty of that ancient, flower-grown pile, drenched with sunshine amid the foliage. Then she advanced to the door. The sea was calm to-day: from that narrow portal no ghostly voices issued, to give her pause. Her foot was on the threshold.

Suddenly the sharp cry:

"Stop where you are!"

And Sebastian, Mauser in hand, came springing down through the bushes into the valley. He approached her quickly.

"You were going in there?"

This time, he had caught her off her guard. Her heart-beats commenced to suffocate her. But she would not admit her fright. She uttered:

"Why not?"

He collected himself. In ordinary tones:

"I advise a guide."

So she drew back, and turned away.

Walking beside her, he began quietly to relate the legend of the Old Ones, the mystery of their voices, the tragedy of the sailor and the priest. He described his first visit there, the ingenuity of the echo-well and the pitfall.

"You see, it's the sort of place one shouldn't rush into blindly. If you like, I'll show you the trap. But you must promise you'll never come here alone. There are other dangers than that."

She stopped, looked at him steadily, and retorted:

"You mean, I suppose, that I might meet some one whom you're expecting."

"Quite so. But not the one you're expecting."

And after a moment's consideration, he told her of Nino, the letter to Naples, the coming of the two mountebanks. Their intention was obvious—to spy, surprise, kill, steal, and escape on a fishing-boat before the alarm.

"To be sure, Nino won't trouble us any more. But his colleagues will be all the keener—not to say nastier—now that it's become a *vendetta* of blood. . . . Besides, that must have been a rosy prospectus he sent off, to bring two such capable *Camorristi* all this way. Do you mind my asking what you gave him, to mail that card to Sangallo?"

This question reached her like the last of a succession of stunning blows. She heard:

"He just tore it up, that card, and threw it away. You might almost as well have handed it to me! But don't be discouraged. They're coming anyhow. I had word of that by the steamer. You'll soon be free."

He stroked the butt of the Mauser, reflectively.

"Was it diamonds?"

What use for subterfuge now? Her lips moved. At last, very low:

"I gave him a diamond out of my chain. . . ."

"Ah. Well, now we must see that they don't get the rest—and us, in the bargain. The way for you to help, is to keep to the villa. Until your friends arrive. . . ."

He inspected her critically.

She was wearing a sage-green linen dress, the poppy-trimmed hat, and tan outing-boots. The things fitted and became her. They were from the best shops in Tunis, and, before that, from Paris. They seemed nearly to reclothe her in the old, fashionable simplicity of their first day of meeting.

Her dazed wits were slow to comprehend his look. Finally, however, flushing, she responded:

"Since my other clothes disappeared, I suppose it was your idea to emphasize as much as possible this—travesty of obligation. . . ."

He took a few steps to and fro. His face smooth again, he returned to examine her costume attentively.

"That dress looks surprisingly well to me. It can't be so old—skirts of that cut were only coming out in the Rue de la Paix in March. It's a curious thing: I associate my first sight of them with a *bouillabaisse* and a quail stewed in wine and green grapes. And that was my last luncheon before I set out for Rome. A luncheon that approached the ideal. The Paris ideal, I mean, of course—not Torregiante's. Ideals vary so, don't they?"

She could only stare at him. He seemed to have no real conception either of his position or that to which he had brought her. She looked at his broad, high forehead—the brow of an intelligent individual—and wondered what normal convolution was lacking behind it. And she had, all at once, a desire to fathom the secret of this extraordinarily misshapen nature. . . .

She said:

"Tell me this: is it safe to be here now?"

"If it weren't, I shouldn't allow it."

"Then, since we're here . . ."

He was right: the time had passed for any small subterfuges between them. Their situation had raised them, at last, even in antagonism, to a plane where anything but frankness seemed petty.

He took off his coat, rolled it up, and laid it across a boulder, in the shade of an oleander. She sat down. He lighted a cigar. Savoring the excellent tobacco luxuriously, he gazed with half-shut eyes out to sea, toward the invisible coast of Italy. Nothing in his demeanor betrayed his intense satisfaction.

She asked:

"Does the steamer come from there?"

"From the northeast." He pointed to the right. "Sicily lies off there. But Sangallo will probably arrive direct from the north."

She nodded. After a pause:

"Awhile ago you spoke of ideals. I should like to know what that word means to you."

"An ideal? . . . Why, the hope of some gratification that doesn't exist."

"Some gratification."

"Certainly. Since there are all sorts of gratification—physical and spiritual, æsthetic and intellectual, sensuously and ascetically religious, logical and emotional, what do I know? One nature is drawn toward one sort, another to another, some natures to

nearly all. But the attainable gratification is never perfect. There's always, I think, in whatever human achievement, a sense of something lacking, a feeling of incompleteness, an inner conviction, of merely semi-victory, that's akin to defeat. In realizing one's dream, one finds that it's not what one expected. . . . The true artist gazes at the completed fabric with a subtle despondency. The visionary, who has arranged the problems of life to his satisfaction, has now and then, I'll wager, a sense of profound uncertainty. . . . The lover, after the intoxication of the first embrace, understands that the woman he loves must be a makeshift for something he imagined her to be."

From under his lowered eyelids he sent at her a swift look. That shot had told! For presently, in a sharpened tone, she returned:

"A man with that opinion should hardly be the one to wreck everything, for the disillusion that he expects beforehand!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But men are made like that! None is so disillusioned as to be incapable of one more illusion. None is so sane that he doesn't contain the capacity for an aberration into idealism. The atheist dreams, perhaps, of perfection in some art. The man who knows nothing of art sees a vision, maybe, of his socialistic world. The saint and the sensualist suffer, in the last analysis, from the same unquenchable thirst. It's the ineradicable mental malady of mankind."

She answered:

"It's the ineradicable proof of divinity in mankind."

And, as he made no reply:

"With your scientific training, and your reputed perception of life, one would think it might have occurred to you that the world is forever moving! That everything is constantly changing, refashioning itself, developing, and aspiring. These very flowers aren't what they were once. They plan their lives. They alter their physical structure for the better. They show an intelligence, a persistence, a bravery, that looks all the while toward the future, toward their perpetuity—one might as well say, toward their immortality. And this same force is in everything. It's intent on improvement. It's born of a belief in something higher to come. It's bound to attain an ideal. . . . That trust, implanted in all nature—have you really never recognized it, or seen the wonder of it, or felt some kinship with it?"

He smiled, while responding:

"Your example's rather an unfortunate one. You speak of flowers, and their experiments in the cause of procreation. You should know that it's not immortality they aspire to, but love. Love happens to be the force that perpetuates the world. The supreme motive-power. The force, in fact, that has brought us here. . . . Instead of praising the flowers for their charming efforts, you'd better blame them, to be thoroughly consistent. For all their ingenuity is merely a counterpart of mine, to attain the object of my desires."

For a while she was silent. In the end:

"It's useless, our ever talking together!"

"Why so?"

"We speak of such things in different tongues."

"Pardon me. If it's love you mean, there's only one language in the world for that. But perhaps, after all, you've never wandered into the regions where that language is learned? . . ."

He scrutinized her cold profile intently, then added, as if in pity:

"And possibly never will. . . ."

She stood up, tingling to her finger-tips with an indignation that she did not know how to put into words. She could only flash forth at him:

"I see more clearly than ever how many doors are shut to you!"

He rose at once to his feet, threw away his cigar, then returned:

"Possibly. But has it ever entered your mind that to you, also, a few doors may be shut? . . . I fancy that all your life you've heard nothing from men but flattery. Suppose you heard now a little of something else?"

She lifted her head. Her lip curled.

"That would hardly astonish me!"

He stood looking down at her with a new expression. She had a shock of surprise, of bewilderment. Was it contempt?

Suddenly she laughed aloud, in a voice that she did not recognize. That would be too droll!

His eyes blazed. He exclaimed:

"Precisely. If you had learned even the rudiments of that language, we shouldn't be here now discussing a mixture of metaphysics and botany! Long since, you'd have responded instinctively, as if obedient to the very voice of Destiny, to a situation, a climax of life, a passion, so transcendental. . . . But, as it is, you happen to be the last word in emotional inaccessibility. In you there exists only cold egotism, self-retention, an almost incredibly unfeminine heartlessness. You're not to be influenced by however powerful an external passion. Your heart can't make the response that is made involuntarily, in fully developed individuals, to an overwhelming desire. Your affections, if ever you feel them, must always have the pallidity, and the coldness, of utter selfishness. Your life with Pamfort was going to be a sort of sentimental minuet—a travesty of real love, that your nominal physical submission would have made more degrading than the least inspired of all those *liaisons* up there in Rome!"

A low laugh escaped him.

"Ah, but I read your thoughts a while ago! You were wondering just where I was deficient. But with you, I don't have to speculate. You have no fibre in you capable of submission, of self-surrender, of defiance of all the world for the most intense thing you'll ever have in your life, of abandonment to the natural joy of your sex—not of receiving, but of giving. . . . But then, you're not a natural woman. If you have the external appearance, you lack all the significant inner organism. A statue in a temple



may not be more beautiful to look at, but it will repay its devotees just as lavishly. . . . Up there, it seemed to me that you must awake—become human. Another ideal! For if you couldn't respond to what I've felt, you'll never respond. No: you were born to promise much, and give nothing. To destroy the hopes you raise. To prove once more the folly of the ideal.

"But why do I say all this? You can't understand me."

For an instant, she remained numb. Then, gradually fury spread through her. She found her voice:

"Ah! This outdoes all the rest! Because such a man as you can't evoke it, it doesn't exist! . . . Yes, thank God, we do speak to each other in different languages! . . ."

"One generally takes pride in his deficiencies."

"You say that!"

Ignoring that speech, he looked at her with a frigid keenness, as he had never looked at her before. He said:

"For you are a deficient, you know. There are certain exaltations that you can never feel. Once on a time, you commiserated with me, because I couldn't realize a Divinity. To-day I commiserate with you, because fields of consciousness just as vast will always be closed to you. You'll die without having lived, that's all."

Her face twitching, her anger choking her, she got out the words:

"You know in your heart that's false! You know that if you could be in his place——"

"Pamfort? Ah, he'll be satisfied, perhaps. He's one more who'll always skim the surface of things, and imagine he's living. I wish you joy of each other."

This last insult was too much. She could hardly repress her desire to spring at him and strike him. And, with her fury—a fury utterly new to her—she had a sensation of profound humiliation, of bafflement, of loss. She had counted on his passion being a part of his punishment. But now his passion seemed done for?

"One would say . . . you were almost ready to let me go! . . . If only you'd reached these conclusions sooner! . . . You might have gone on, a while longer, in your precious career, of shamelessness, and uselessness."

"Uselessness? Is it you who say that?"

He stared at her in apparent curiosity, then demanded:

"I presume you don't visualize yourself at all? . . . Your past life, full of luxury, of refining influences, of elegant training—what's it been for? Your superb acceptance of fortune with what return? Do you know that off there, on the other side of the world, countless men are laboring with their muscles and nerves, from morning till night, enduring danger and weariness in a hundred forms, growing old before their time, to give you your position in life? They bought you your way into high places. They dressed

you in silks and jewels. They fed you with foods that they had never imagined. They surrounded you with the homage of courts. But what have you ever paid back? And what will you ever pay? By Jove, if we're to talk of uselessness, we're in the same box, you and I!"

He concluded, calmly:

"You understand, I don't blame you. By the same token, I don't blame myself. We take what we can, and we give what we feel like giving. The fact remains, however, that from the world's point of view—the point of view you value so highly—we're just a couple of parasites together."

She fell back a pace, as if that had been a blow. But he said:

"One day, in Rome, I saw a strange thing. In a studio, a man and a woman together. A sculptor and a young peasant-girl. . . ."

His eyes turned blank, as he contemplated the memory of that scene.

"She'd come to his door, a model. A beautiful creature, with the splendor of something wild and original. That dress you have on would have made her ridiculous. Your jewels would have cheapened her. She was formed for archaic garments, for goat-skins, for nudity.

"And her heart was like that. Hot, impulsive, capable of deep passions, sacrifices, crimes. The heart of a being intensely human, unrefined, unspoiled—fresh, as it were, from the youth of the world. A natural creature. . . .

"They loved each other. The simplicity and fearlessness of that love belonged to the age she seemed a part of. Indeed, they were made for each other—two natures almost unique to-day, but quite oblivious to the anachronism of their surroundings. They gave each other everything. And the result was wonderful.

"For him I'm sure she was the cause of great work. I know very little of his past life. I don't know how much she developed him—that humble instrument. But I know that in her he found his dreams come true. Dreams, I mean, of an art of marvellous vigor and health, inexpressibly pure, with the purity, so to say, of the dawn of life.

"And what he's done, since they came together, has been an inspiration to lives about them. United, they've attained, through the interaction of love and work, a peculiar majesty of value. Even I could feel that, when I looked at a certain thing he'd done. In that marble, as well as in them, there was an indescribable incentive toward change, a force that impelled one, irresistibly, to seek. . . . What I felt it's difficult to explain. I may not know very clearly myself, even now. . . . But there came to me a need of air, space, solitude, nature, and of a love, and all its attendant emotions, appropriate to that. And because my mind was continually full of you, I thought, 'If only——'

"Chance and impulse produced the opportunity. But I had misjudged *my* instrument. Behind her, one may say there was nothing. Behind you, there

was far too much. She remained intensely a woman. You, by comparison, had practically ceased to be one. Not your fault, naturally—but mine. An error of comprehension. It seemed to me, up there, that you must contain so much—even that! . . .

"All the same, consider the vitality of the ideal! That vague, untranslatable desire still clings to me. If I could begin all over, I'd try again."

And, looking her in the eyes, he ended:

"But now I believe I'd go to a savage, like her, in that search."

She managed to gasp:

"A savage! . . . Surely! . . . For that's what you are! . . ."

She sent one more flash at him. But it seemed to fall midway between them. She left him, blinded and suffocated by a frenzy of impotence.

In the villa, she twisted her hands, and ground her teeth together.

To kill him! To see him dead! Or rather, to see him dying!

The sight of her face in the mirror turned her motionless, cold all over.

For she saw the face of a wild thing, a savage. . . .

## CHAPTER XVII

SEBASTIAN remained before the temple, looking out toward Italy.

It was late afternoon. The calm sea displayed, on its vast expanse of blue, long lines of light, some silvery, some copper-colored. To the north, a little clump of lateen-sails was floating in—four flecks of palest gold. But nowhere did any other craft appear.

"Why don't they come? . . ."

He put away his binoculars reluctantly. He would have preferred, to-day, to meet the issue, and have done with it.

Just now, while looking at her altered face, in the midst of his attack he had realized completely all that he had done to her. And there had come to him a desire to escape as soon as might be into oblivion.

In this spot, so fair, so silent, and so natural, where simplicity had supplanted extravagance, where frugality had replaced debauchery, a veil of fummy emotions, which had stood between him and his conscience for years, was gradually thinning. His past mode of life, the associations toward which he had always gravitated hitherto, the excesses in which he had steeped himself, the perversities augmented by defiance, would all have been impossible here. On this isle, despite its vivid luxuriance, its bizarre

exuberance of form and color, an influence well-nigh austere enveloped him and worked upon him. There rose from the earth an exhalation of unpoluted nature. The sane breeze off the water caught from the foliage odors mysteriously reminiscent of childhood. The sky had never seemed so close and yet so deep, so personal, so significant. For a long while, indeed, he had almost forgot that the sky could hold other significances than æsthetic ones.

The hour was approaching when his whole organism, the mad stimulation of years dying out in all its fibres, would return to its nearest imitation of normality. . . . Of what feelings would he be capable, then?

Already, at any rate, remorse was creeping into his heart. Remorse! An emotion that he had forgotten for so long that he had believed himself incapable of it!

He turned to the temple. No sound issued from the door-way. The unusual silence was like a cessation of menace, a mute invitation to enter. He went inside.

For a time, by the light of tapers, he scanned the simple, rough-hewn walls, the roof so finely joined, the humble altar at the far end of the chamber, holding in its hollowed top, after all these centuries, the ashes of an ancient offering. One would have said that this had been the sanctuary of some very pure religion, but for the treacherous pitfall.

He passed round the trap, and approached the little altar. As his eyes roamed over the wall behind it,

he saw, high up, an inscription in archaic Greek that he had missed before. He discerned the words:

*To reach my altar, that part of you which you have loved best must be destroyed.*

He smiled at last.

"The pitfall explained? Symbolism made emphatic with a vengeance!"

The taper went out. In the darkness, he remained for a while quite motionless. But it seemed to him that he was not alone. All that had ever come to pass in that little sanctuary of an unknown faith, all the thoughts and prayers and hopes that had been born there, rose round him, in the obscurity, animate once more. . . . Or, at least, he felt that a host of strange influences were assailing him. . . . Or were those influences one instead of many, and stirring, instead of round about him, just within himself? . . .

The Isle of Life! What had it meant to the world, what had it been, what force had it exerted on its time and on the future, before the centuries had effaced its history?

At last, he shrugged his shoulders, and regained the sunshine.

On the other side of the headland, half-way down the hill, he found Annibale behind the screen of agaves, watching the village.

"What have you seen?" Sebastian demanded, sitting down beside the sentinel, and offering a cigarette.

"No one has tried to come up. Two of Big Pa-



ganni's children are on the southern slope with the goats. The hermit has been out walking. He showed himself on the eastern ridge an hour ago, then passed down into the groves."

"Are you sure it was he?"

"Of course."

"It's a far look. From here no one could make out his face."

"Eh, I take it neither of Nino's friends knows how to carry himself like a Signuri."

"The hermit carries himself like a Signuri!"

"Già! Like a gentleman."

"You surprise me. All the hermits that I've ever seen were dirty, shambling fellows about as intelligent-looking as gorillas."

"It needs several kinds of fish to make up God's netful!"

Sebastian gazed down at the village. Despite the clarity of the air, to-day there was an unusual effect of distance. At the bottom of the great gray-green amphitheatre, the houses, strewn round the beach, looked like the vertebræ of some monster cast up by the deep. The few little figures, moving about and between them, seemed almost like ants. Some purplish threads—drying nets—were stretched out on the sand. Here and there, from the water, a rowing-boat sent thus far only the faded red of its interior—an impression as if of a rose-petal afloat. The esplanade was deserted. The feluccas were all at sea.

"And what," remarked Sebastian, "would you say our two *Camorristi* were doing now?"

"Maybe sitting in the Grand Café of the Sea, over a cool glass of wine—may they die in a pest-house!"

"But when, in your opinion, will they make their little attempt?"

"Who knows that? They take their ease. There's no hurry. Why should they get themselves in a perspiration, when we're here all the time?"

"I'd like to be done with those two, at least. Inaction has never appealed to me much."

"Truly, Signuri? But it's not so bad, sitting here and watching. The future's full of time. It will happen when God is quite ready. One can't very well hurry God. Unless, perhaps, one chanced to be a saint up in Paradise?"

Sebastian got up.

"For my part, Annibale, I'm going down."

"To the village, Signuri?"

"To the village. Perhaps I might even manage to bait them on?"

"It will soon be dark," Annibale protested, knitting his handsome brows.

"All the better. The darkness may give them more stomach."

"To follow you?"

"Precisely. They'd be afraid to use fire-arms here. I can walk home all the way with my back turned. If I managed to lead them past, I suppose you could hit the broadest one?"

Annibale's classic features were disfigured by an unpleasant smile.

"To-day this old machine is loaded with iron filings

and tacks. . . . But joking aside, Signuri," he added earnestly, "knives are far better. A knife-hilt always snuggles into the hand so sympathetically!"

Sebastian shook his head.

"These *Camorristi* are like eels at close quarters. To play the game safe, we ought to blow them into the air from a distance, and leave their stilettos beside them, for the carabinieri to see it was self-defence."

Annibale reflected, at last grinned broadly, and rubbed his large palms together.

"After all, we may amuse ourselves yet at this business, Signuri! A candle to the Madonna, out of my wages, if we bag them both together!"

"By all means! We'll be extravagant, and make it a pair."

Sebastian unfastened the rifle-stock from the Mauser automatic, slipped the latter into his pocket, and went down the hill.

When he came to the village, the sun was low, and veiled in filmy clouds. The sea was a blinding sheet of silver, through which, half absorbed, as it were, by the enveloping dazzle, a dozen fishing-boats stole in toward land. Before the beach, knee-deep in the still water, some boys stood watching the little fleet of peaked sails. Against the luminous expanse, their half-naked, brown bodies seemed intensely attenuated, drooping to poses in which appeared the vigor, softened by grace, that resides in ancient statues.

Sebastian traversed the esplanade. In the doorways, seated beside the family crates of chickens,

slatternly women were spinning flax, while their children, squatting in the dust, fanned the flames, in the charcoal-boxes set out on the highway, by which the evening meal was to be cooked. From door to door, and from loggia to loggia, the women gossiped, with a racket of voices shrill and harsh. But at Sebastian's approach, they called in their young ones, fell silent, and averted their heads. When he had passed, they glared after him, with eyes full of hostility and fear. There took place among them a silent, but violent, pantomime of distrust. Many made gestures to avert misfortune. The babies, peering round their mother's skirts, imitated these motions with their tiny fingers.

Before the Grand Café of the Sea, some benches and tables stood ready for the evening trade. There, with their backs against the wall, the two mountebanks were dozing.

To-day they had put away their eccentric costumes. They wore coats and trousers patched all over, and wretched wooden-soled shoes. The smaller one, who on steam-ship day had carried the guitar, sprawled back with his hat pulled over his face—but in the crown of the hat there was a hole. On the other hand, his companion, the ugly wretch with the extraordinary shoulders, made no such pretence. He stared at Sebastian openly. But in his black eyes there appeared a sort of sickly dimness.

This fellow, in fact, looked ill. His dark, square visage, as coarse-featured as if chopped out of wood, showed a vaguely bluish pallor. He seemed

to be sinking into his chair beneath a supreme debility.

Sebastian sat down at a table near by. To serve him, the Syndic himself came out of the tunnel-like wine-shop.

At sight of his customer, the café keeper's apoplectic countenance brightened. Probably he remembered that this stranger had complimented him. And compliments, particularly in Torregiante, may overbalance a good deal of indefinite suspicion.

When he had drunk a tumblerful of *chianti*, Sebastian ordered wine and oil for the villa. He inquired how long it would take to procure some cases of *Asti spumante*, and some of the best vermouth. The Syndic, no doubt, received the impression of unlimited good business in prospect. His eyes began to shine. His whole face ingenuously expressed the thought, "After all, they have certainly misjudged him, those others!" When Sebastian produced his pocket-book, to pay in advance, the café keeper looked as if he saw there the source of a neat little income for many days.

Sebastian negligently exhibited a fat packet of bank-notes. While counting out the price, he became aware of a gradual tenseness in the two figures near by. Between his fingers he held perhaps more money than Torregiante had ever seen in one heap. It was certainly far more than enough to tempt a couple of *Camorristi* to action?

When the Syndic had received his pay, he cried, in a tone exceptionally full and strong, on account of his satisfaction:

"A receipted bill in one moment, Signuri!"

"Nonsense. Receipted bills between men of honor?"

The Syndic drew in his breath, and looked at the vagabonds proudly. Sebastian added:

"I'm not a bad judge of men, you know. Nor, I venture to say, are you."

"*Daveru!* I know a man when I've looked at him once or twice!"

"Naturally. Otherwise, you'd hardly have become a leader of men. But not many have the gift."

"Not many, indeed, Signuri!" the Syndic agreed, twirling his walrus-like mustache.

"For instance, in Torregiante——"

"*Mah!* In Turrigianti! What should they know of human nature!"

"All the same, they form decided opinions."

"Goats, Signuri! One leads—the rest follow. That's it!"

"But if any one leads in such things, to my mind it ought to be you."

The Syndic, as this idea penetrated his brain, flushed brick-red. And Sebastian knew that he had dropped a thought which might result in some slight abatement, at least, of Torregiante's hostility. At once, he stood up, and shook hands. Then he turned to the mountebanks.

"How is business?" he inquired, genially.

The broad-shouldered ruffian answered, in a dull voice, with apparent effort:

"Little good, Signuri! We made a mistake to come here. Every one is too poor."

His bluish face was covered with moisture. His broad, flat lips were almost violet-colored. His eyelids, less, as it seemed, from secretiveness than from lassitude, slowly covered his large, dim eyes.

"This one," thought Sebastian, "is almost *hors de combat*, for some reason. However. . . ."

He took out his pocket-book, and laid a five-lire note on the table. Later on, he might want the Syndic to remember that he had exposed his money before these men.

"To change your luck," he said, and turned away.

Old Ilario, just landed from his felucca, was trying to hurry past unseen. But Sebastian, with a friendly smile, intercepted the fisherman.

"Good-evening, Ilario. I suppose you know, by this time, that you're a grandpapa?"

The old man's rugged face, the color of mahogany, framed in white bristles, flinched for an instant, then hardened again. He raised his chin. His eyes, his broken fangs, his silver ear-rings, glinted. With a ferocious sneer, he rasped out:

"A man can't be a grandfather who has no daughter!"

Sebastian went on, imperturbably:

"I should like to see a healthier proof that you are. Already he has lungs like a leather bag-pipe, that little brat! And a strength to tear his mother's clothing half off her back. And eyes that can look at the sun without winking. In addition to which, he is probably the most depraved little devil, for his age, that I've ever had the pleasure of seeing, for tan-

trums, and squalling, and scratching, and God knows what misbehavior. . . . Come up some day and have a look at him."

He could not more aptly have described the Sicilian ideal for an infant—the type of offspring that gives parents and relatives the best cause for pride. A faint tremor crossed the ancient's puckered mouth. Suddenly, with a murderous glare, he barked:

"Let the two of them bring him down to see me—and I'll promise to make him an orphan!"

He stamped away, shaking curses out of his throat. The Syndic remarked:

"Eh, eh, we nurse our anger, you see, in Turri-gianti!"

Said Sebastian:

"He is only angry with himself. And that's often the cause of the harshest words of all. . . ."

After a moment, he went away, without looking behind him.

In order to give the *Camorristi* time for thought and decision, he penetrated a pestilential alleyway, gained the rear of the village, and strolled, through the vegetable terraces, up the hillside. But from above the groves called to him. He continued to ascend. Amid the trees, he remembered, with an unaccustomed sensation of pleasure, Little Paganni.

As he approached the rocky clearing, he missed the sound of the flute. However, a goat-bell jingled. He parted the bushes quietly.

The goats were all afoot, peering at him with lowered beards, their hind legs spread out, their udders distended with milk. Near by, on the grass, two



children lay asleep, arms round each other, faces upturned to the softening light. They were Little Paganni and his four-year-old sister Giacinta.

Sebastian drew near on noiseless feet.

The two small faces, dewy from slumber, were startling in their beauty. The tiny girl's flushed cheeks were framed by a mass of auburn curls. Her mouth, half open, was like a bud. Her sole garment, twisted up, revealed the sturdy, dimpled legs of a perfect physical specimen. The little, separate toes, the fat fingers half uncurled from their embrace of the brother's neck, were as if made for kisses. Deep in his heart Sebastian felt a shock of something new. . . . He imagined it to be his æsthetic sense, recognizing fully, for the first time, the immature human animal in its perfection.

All at once, with a single movement, Little Paganni sat upright. His eyes fell on Sebastian. And, involuntarily perhaps, he threw one puny arm across his sister's body.

The baby, still half asleep, glimpsing the towering figure and the strange face, uttered a cry. Sebastian stepped back.

"I'm sorry I frightened you, Pan."

The goatherd stiffened his lips.

"I am not frightened, Signuri," he answered, sullenly.

"Then tell Giacinta that I'm not going to eat her."

Little Paganni addressed his sister.

"Why did I buy you an amulet? Have you no faith at all, love of God?"

Giacinta took a wild look at Sebastian from be-

tween her fingers, then hid her face in Little Paganni's lap. Her infantile wails resounded:

*"Mi scantu! Mi scantu! È cattivu! . . ."*

"She's afraid of you," announced Little Paganni, tensely resentful.

"So I'm sorry to see."

"She says you're bad."

"So I hear."

"Well, what do you expect? These small children are all like that. They can't keep the truth to themselves."

He patted Giacinta's head soothingly. She blotted her face against him harder than ever. One still heard the muffled sobs:

*"È cattivu. . . . È cattivu. . . ."*

At last, Sebastian said:

"So. They can't hide the truth?"

"Eh!"

"Then, you also think I'm bad, I suppose?"

The seven-year-old averted his eyes. His delicate skin flushed scarlet. Finally, with a shrug, he responded, in angry accents:

"Everybody knows that."

"Ah! . . . Yet you talk to me, Little Paganni."

"Because you come here. Because I'd be ashamed to run away."

There was a silence. Sebastian remonstrated, gently:

"Still, the last time I appeared, you were rather more hospitable than to-day."

"You hadn't frightened my women-folks. Be-

sides, what's said now in the village hadn't been said, at that time."

"And what's said now in the village?"

"That something terrible must happen to Turri-gianti, because you've come here. One's gone already! Nino! . . ."

On remembering that, the boy turned ashen. But at last, clenching his hands, he got out the words:

"Is it true . . . that you took him . . . to make ink for the Devil out of his blood?"

Sebastian laughed. But, at that sound, Little Pagganni sprang to his feet, and stood astride of his sister, his face distorted by terror and hatred, his small body aquiver with defiance. Stretching out his hands with the fingers curved like claws, he shouted:

"Go away! If you don't—I have a knife in my pocket! I'll kill you with it!"

The man felt a shiver down his back. All the warmth seemed to leave his heart.

"Good-by, Pan," he said. "I promise I won't come back."

He departed.

Where the groves gave place, at length, to the maize-patches of the lower slope, Sebastian halted in the shelter of a great mass of prickly-pears, and looked down, with unseeing eyes, upon the village.

The feluccas were all beached. Beyond the dilapidated roofs, many stout yellow masts stuck up against the water, which was suffused with golden light. The sun had already set: but an intense after-glow remained to fill half the sky with raw chrome-

yellow. To the west, the heavens contained some attenuated and ragged clouds, like vast, random smears of chocolate-colored paint. These gradually faded. Their barbaric hue, abnormal, cruel, was absorbed by the softness of the twilight.

And the melancholy of that hour found its complement in the immense, unprecedented melancholy of his thoughts. . . .

He tasted now the full measure of his solitude, his isolation from mankind. His nature and his life had raised round him a barrier from which, at last, affection of every sort instinctively recoiled. He had long mocked tenderness, and made ruthlessness his ideal. In his commerce with humanity, he had paid out only hardness. And finally humanity was returning him his own coin, with interest.

But for him, the retaliation of the world had not reached its climax in the recriminations of conventional beings, or even in the enmity of the woman he professed to love, but, rather, in the aversion of a half-savage child, whose courage and beauty had brought to him the first thrill of a paternal longing.

For the first time in his life, there stole through his mind a dim realization of unworthiness, of a sort of shameful inadequacy, of his deliberate discord with the universe. At that moment, when the boy had faced him, all atremble with contending fright and valiancy, had he not seen, in one flash, the secret of the world's antagonism—not the antagonism of blindness, or of hypocrisy, but of all that was in-

stinctively true in human nature, for all that was perverse in him? . . .

Staring down, he remained there, hidden by the rough foliage, while the west was extinguished with Sicilian swiftness, and dark descended from the zenith like a curtain. The village faded into the night, till only the scattered window-lights remained, to mark where it had been. With a start, he woke from his revery, to find that the boundaries of his vision had crept inward perilously close.

He had forgotten the *Camorristi*! It was too late, now, to play his game with them in safety. Unless he wanted to risk a stab at every hedge he would have to regain the villa by some trick.

No doubt they would wait for him on the hillside, below Annibale's ambush? In that case, the safe path would be the one along the northern precipice.

He climbed to the northern ridge, found the path, and set out on his dangerous journey. The way was soon little more than a foot in width. On his left, the perpendicular wall of rock. On his right, black space, and far below, the whisper of the sea. A mis-step might have sent him headlong into the depths—and nothing would have been easier than to stumble in this void. . . . He regretted not having taken off his heavy boots. When he came to the platform, he would do so. . . .

Sooner than he expected, his left hand lost touch with the wall. He had reached the platform.

From cliff to edge, the platform was perhaps a dozen feet in width: but even those narrow limits

were invisible. He stood still, to regain his bearings.

And slowly, though he heard and saw nothing, he became aware that he was not alone.

Two presences. One behind, one in front.

The *Camorristi*!

His hand stole to his pocket. He jerked at his automatic pistol. It was caught in the lining of his coat!

Then, while he was tugging at the weapon, came the attack.

From the encircling gloom, two blacker shadows, hurtling through the air like leaping beasts of prey. Two long, thin flashes—brandished steel that barely caught the starlight. Two gasps of effort, as the stilettos were driven at their mark.

His brain woke to an action miraculously swift. As if at a clarion-call, all his strength and cunning surged to his defence. He realized that he could not get the pistol out in time. But those flying figures were still in mid-air when he had judged their distance, weighed his chances, acted.

His foot shot forth, and caught the nearest in the stomach. With a twist, he took the dagger of the second deep in his shoulder-muscles. This assassin instantly plucked out the steel, to stab again. But Sebastian's right hand closed round his wrist. His left went under the other's arm, and clutched the coat. On that leverage, with a sudden jolt he broke the arm at the elbow. The man uttered a sharp cry, dropped his stiletto, and staggered back. And, as

he tottered on the brink, Sebastian's fist landed with a crack against his chin. The *Camorrista* vanished into the abyss.

When he had mastered his faintness, Sebastian struck a match. In the middle of the platform, the broad-shouldered *Camorrista* lay on his back. His bluish face was contorted. His mouth and eyes were open. He did not move.

Sebastian dropped the match. His strength was ebbing rapidly. But before losing consciousness, he would have to traverse the remainder of the path, regain the villa. . . .

He resumed his way, giddy, clinging to the rock, swaying toward the edge, at times dropping to his knees, but always struggling on, like an automaton. . . .

In the villa, Ghirlaine was undressing, when she heard a shout of challenge, a crash of furniture, a babble of voices, Fannia's scream. Doors slammed. An unnatural laugh resounded. But Fannia's lamentations filled the house. Even the baby was crying.

What had happened?

With a shawl round her, she ran into the corridor. Sebastian's door stood open. In the light of candles, she saw a basin on a table, full of reddened water. Annibale was tearing up a sheet. In a chair, a big pallid torso, half recumbent, smeared with blood. Against one herculean shoulder, Fannia's hands pressed tight, and bright blood trickling out between her fingers, over her wrists.

Sebastian raised his head. His gaze met Ghir-

laine's. His eyes lost their blankness—in them flared up, for a moment, a fierce light, of bitterness and mockery.

“Not yet! Go back to bed. This sort of thing's a little too strong for you.”

She found herself in her room again.

But throughout the night there remained before her the picture of Fannia's strong fingers pressing back that red tide. . . .



## CHAPTER XVIII

NEXT morning, the carabinieri were notified of the attack. On the platform, they found one *Camorrista*, still breathing. In the water, three hundred feet below, the other was bumping gently against the rocks. A rowing-boat put round the island and recovered this body. The injured assassin was carried down to the village.

The day following, the *Maresciallo* requested Sebastian to present himself for the identification. It appeared that the broad-shouldered ruffian had not long to live.

Pale, still somewhat light-headed, his left arm bound to his side, Sebastian arrived at the police station toward noon. This effort had caused him more fatigue and pain than an observer would have suspected. A fierce stoicism, a determination to afford no one the pleasure of his suffering, accomplished a sort of miracle in bringing him, with all his old appearance of ponderous formidability, to run this gauntlet.

It was a day of scorching heat, for summer had at last descended in full force upon Torregiante. The sky resembled a vast brazier. The heights were veiled in yellowish mist. Beneath the sun's rays, the esplanade seemed dissolving in a myriad vibrations. But from the black doorways of the houses

issued a breath as cold and damp as if from subterranean caves. There, in the shadows, faces gathered, stolidly morose, almost brutish in their stupid animosity, but stamped, one and all, with a certain look of disappointment. The sympathies of Torregiante were evidently with the losers.

The Marshal of carabinieri, however, greeted Sebastian with something like his first friendliness. The Syndic had testified to the display of money before the mountebanks—it was clearly a case of attempted murder and robbery. And the fact that Sebastian had worsted two armed desperadoes with his bare hands could not but resuscitate the soldier's admiration. At one moment, the honest fellow seemed on the point of some confession, an explanation, possibly, of his late coolness? But abruptly he led the way into the police station.

The jail was a dim, whitewashed room, with small barred windows close to the vaulted ceiling. In one corner, on a cot, lay the injured *Camorrista*. Beside him sat the priest.

Don Vigilio rose, came forward, and took Sebastian's hand. His old eyes were full of pain; his perpetual thin smile was tremulous.

"Ah, my son! This poor victim of temptation! And the other, already gone! What a calamity for you, to have to be the instrument of justice!"

"Quite so," Sebastian murmured. "But one has very little choice, when a pair of stilettos are against one's ribs. The instinct of self-preservation, you know—it's apt to cause rather violent gestures."

The priest shook his head.

"The instinct of self-preservation alone would never have helped you. It was God, who stood beside you in that peril, as in the one before it—who turned away the knives, just as He bore you up above the sea. These two poor creatures had finished the tasks He set for them, here below. For you, there are doubtless still many things to do."

The Marshal touched Sebastian on the arm. They approached the pallet.

The *Camorrista's* rough-hewn visage was more haggard than ever, strangely purplish, glistening with moisture. His dull eyes finally opened, and fixed themselves on Sebastian. Then, at recognition of his enemy, he acquired slowly a look of almost unearthly hatred. A hoarse, rattling whisper broke from his lips:

"Wait. . . . Among *us*, it is never finished. . . ."

And, raising one hand with difficulty from the blanket, he tried to make the sign of menace. But he fell back in a convulsion.

Said the carabineer:

"You identify this man as your assailant, Excellency?"

Sebastian roused himself from contemplation of that countenance.

"Certainly. But as for what I did to him . . . Curious! . . . If there were only a physician!"

"Physician! Eh, I doubt if there's ever been one in Torregiante!"

Bending down, Sebastian examined the *Camor-*

*rista's* eyes and lips, pulled aside the coverlid from his chest, felt his pulse. Then, straightening himself sharply, he brushed off his hands, with the involuntary gesture of a man who has touched something he would rather have avoided. To the Marshal:

"What symptoms, since you brought him here?"

The carabineer recounted them, adding:

"A kick in the stomach, you see——"

"A kick in the stomach? Nonsense. . . . Is there cholera at Naples now?"

"Cholera? Why, perhaps, a few cases. . . ."

Soldier and priest stared at Sebastian aghast. The latter announced:

"In my opinion, this man is dying of cholera."

There was a long silence. From the damp walls of that cell, something immeasurable, crushing, cold as death, seemed to descend upon them. Yet, through the high, barred windows, the hot breeze bore in the customary nauseous odors of the village, and the sounds of every day—the grunting of the lean black pigs, and many children's voices. . . .

The Marshal found his tongue.

"Cholera! But I have seen plenty of that!"

"So have I. And learned that there's more than one kind. This case, I should judge, began abortively. If that is so, his injury has developed it. At present he has the physiognomy of a true *coleroso*. Use your eyes."

"Cholera!" ejaculated the carabineer, passing his hand across his brow. "But it is impossible! Eh, *Padre?*"

"Surely, surely! God would not permit it, in my Torregiante! These poor, humble creatures! All these little ones, so helpless!"

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

"I may be wrong. I advise you, all the same, to isolate this fellow, and burn his clothes. A few days will show. If it's cholera, you'll find out soon enough! This population will be practically wiped out. You know how they live. They'll merely die like flies. . . . Well, *Maresciallo*? If you've quite finished with me?"

The soldier pulled himself together.

"Pass, Excellency," he muttered.

The trio went out on the esplanade.

"At any rate," stammered the priest, "this one will soon pass on. I go now to prepare his Viaticum."

And turning to Sebastian, he inquired:

"Are you too tired to walk with me to the church?"

"I? Not at all!"

They set out along the water-front, toward the eastern promontory.

The church, surmounted by its rough bell-tower, stood forth, with the little parish-house, on the out-reaching spine of rock, against the glittering sea. Small, rude of contour, with all its details bespeaking slipshod labor and economy of funds, it seemed nevertheless, in comparison with Torregiante's other edifices, almost imposing. Its arched doorway made a spot of intense black against the blazing walls. On the threshold appeared a little ragged boy. It was

the youngster that had first guided Sebastian toward the villa.

"My acolyte," the priest remarked, absent-mindedly. "An orphan. Maria takes care of him, with alternating cuffs and kisses, after the manner of all natural tyrants. . . . And there she is in person."

At a window of the parish-house loomed the fat old housekeeper, with her triple chin, her sprouting moles, and toothless gums. She gazed down at Sebastian stonily. Her deep voice bellowed forth:

"If it's a visitor you're bringing to table, there's not enough to go round!"

Whereupon, she pulled in the shutters with a bang.

Don Vigilio flushed.

"Ah, these islanders of mine! Who ever knows how to take them! Sometimes as courteous as princes. Another day, they shame themselves by their brutality."

"They dislike me," Sebastian answered, with a short laugh. "And, in this instance, they don't trouble to conceal their feelings. Do you know, if it had been I, instead of those other two, I'm sure the village would have made a *festa*."

The priest protested, almost with agitation:

"Never! Never! You mustn't think such things. You're strange to them, and simple natures always mistrust what's strange. When I first came here, it was practically the same. Sometimes I said, 'Dear Lord, shall I ever really reach these hearts, at once

so simple and so complex?' Then, all at once, as if in one day, everything was different. Their faces, as it were, opened to me. Their smiles greeted me—the indescribably sweet smiles of the little people. I felt a warm current of love miraculously flowing back and forth, between their souls and mine. How good it was! My long efforts crowned with happiness! To feel the love of others—in that sensation there's almost something like experiencing the love of God. And why not, since we're all parts of God? But to receive, one must have given. That's it! Whatever one gives, of good or evil, will be returned eventually, a hundred-fold augmented by that commerce. . . ."

They were before the arched doorway.

"Enter, my son," said the old man, and with his frail hand gently urged Sebastian into the church.

A black expanse of pavement was divided into three parts by a double row of stucco pillars, slate-gray in the obscurity. The plaster walls were shrouded in deep shadows: the little chapels ranged against them, two on each side, were almost invisible. But above, the long, narrow windows let in diagonal rays of sunshine, which lost themselves in mid-air against the garish motley of a stained-glass bay, behind the chancel. There a tawdry altar, set with some tallow candles and rosettes of paper flowers, bore up a wooden crucifix, vividly painted, the Christ extraordinarily bestrewn with blood.

Cool, silent, impregnated with scents of dust, burnt wax, and incense, even this place gave forth that suggestion of solemnity and mystery, of age and un-

alterable majesty, which in such old countries informs the humblest of its kind. Within these portals, something of the faith and awe of a myriad departed worshippers seemed redolently embalmed.

At the door, the old priest took water and crossed himself. When Sebastian failed to follow his example, Don Vigilio's face fell. But he beckoned the stranger toward a chapel.

"The likeness of Saint Giosuè the Admiral, our patron," he announced.

Sebastian saw a blackened, primitive painting of a person in religious dress, one hand raised in benediction. The panel was surrounded by an amazing collection of tin hearts, cheap jewelry, and votive pictures in which were portrayed all manner of disasters—shipwrecks, avalanches, drownings, assassinations, death-bed scenes—each arrested, just before the fatal moment, by the appearance of the saint in whirling clouds.

"And who," Sebastian inquired, "was Saint Giosuè?"

"Ah, as for that, they will tell you hereabouts that he was a Norman, a converted Arab, a Roman, even a Carthaginian or a Greek. For while they know nothing of those races that preceded them, and handed down their various traits to them, they love the old names. As a matter of fact, Saint Giosuè was a soldier of fortune from abroad, who took service with Roger the Norman. But he came here, one day, for a certain reason, and thereafter gave up deeds of blood for better works."



"And do you attribute his change of heart to the climate of Torregiante?"

"It is all written down, my son; and some day you shall read it," Don Vigilio responded, quietly, and led the way toward the high-altar.

Their footfalls re-echoed. From behind a pillar, the acolyte peered out at them. Halting below the chancel, they contemplated the Crucifix.

"Well?" asked Don Vigilio at last.

"Very good, indeed, I should judge, for this locality. For you and me, perhaps, it rather turns the place into a shambles. But I fancy that for these people no less blood would visualize the Passion properly."

The priest's face brightened.

"You're right. In Saint Peter's, it would be too terrible. But here it is necessary."

And, after a pause:

"Catholicism is so catholic, so various, in its unity! For the sage, these things are awesome symbols. For the illiterate, they must be almost animate realities. Is it not wonderful, that God has provided this way to salvation, which may move through the self-same instruments the intellectual as poignantly as the ignorant?"

Sebastian glanced curiously at the old man, so different, in his view-point, from the average parish-priest. Perhaps, thought the visitor, such opinions were responsible for his presence in Torregiante? About to ask Don Vigilio where his first church had been, he heard:

"I was in hopes that there would be something for us to do here together, to-day. But you aren't of the Faith, I take it?"

"No," said Sebastian, with the shadow of a smile. "I walk in darkness. . . ."

The words had no sooner left his lips, than, with a slight shock, he realized their truth. He walked indeed, and had always walked, in darkness! The experiences of those others, their spiritual expansion in the radiance of trust and faith, had never come to him, who had been so gluttonous of sensation. And it was with a kind of smothered sullenness, as if at comprehension of an innate inadequacy, that he added:

"All my life I've tried my best to sample every emotion. But there are a few beyond me. For instance, belief in the intangible, when the tangible is so full of disillusionments."

"You find the tangible full of disillusionments!"

The priest laid his hand on Sebastian's.

"My son, forgive me beforehand, and let me tell you this, religion aside. The world is a mirror. One sees in it only one's reflection. So, one must cleanse the heart, and then the reflection will be bright. . . . In your life, I presume, you've committed certain crimes?"

"Many, I fear, *Padre*, from your point of view."

"And now you have the deaths of two men on your conscience."

"Those two? They rest there as lightly as if they'd been a couple of mad dogs."

"You think so now. You think so now. . . ."

Shaking his head, he murmured:

"A terrible thing, to go before God's Judgment-seat all begrimed, when one might so easily go clean!"

"But even after contrition, confession, and absolution, how should one be really sure that one's sufficiently presentable?"

"Because our blessed Lord Himself has said, 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.'"

"Ah, there we're getting deeper than I'd care to go with you—particularly here. . . . One more question, however. In your opinion, can absolution ever really wipe out the past?"

Don Vigilio considered, then replied:

"I shall not answer you quite as I would one of my parishioners. Perhaps not absolution itself wipes out the past, so much as the act of repentance. For when a sinner truly repents his past, in that moment his past is transformed. From all his offences suddenly the offence falls off; and forthwith they are dignified, ennobled, into the instruments of his salvation. What folly men utter, who say the past is unchangeable! Nothing is so easy to change. All the wrongs you've ever done take on the grandeur of such tools as fashion an ineffable masterpiece, in that moment when you kneel and say, from the heart, 'Forgive me my trespasses. . . .'"

In the end, Sebastian held out his hand.

"You are a good man, *Padre*."

"We are all good men, my son. Though some of us aren't yet aware of it. . . ."

On the church steps, Don Vigilio looked down toward the village. The words escaped him:

"Cholera, in Torregiante? No, no! I can't believe that, with all respect to your diagnosis. We're too defenceless. And one is never struck, in this world, unless some means of defence exists in him. Or, if it is cholera, then the means of defence undoubtedly exists. . . . Or a purpose would be accomplished, an end gained, that could not be gained otherwise. . . . Who knows? Who knows?"

Sebastian left him standing there in the fierce sunlight, gazing down, wrapped in thought, upon his village.

At the foot of the promontory, the school-master glided to his side.

Shabby, cadaverous, his sparse mustaches protruding, his eyes glistening with a treacherous eagerness, he looked the starved rat more than ever to-day. Hat in hand, he sidled along beside Sebastian, exclaiming extravagantly over the bandages, pouring out condolences, showering admiration. With a staccato laugh, he concluded:

"But at least, that wasn't why you went to church!"

"No? And why not?"

"Ah! Ah! Intellectuals have a way of recognizing one another."

"Really?"

"Naturally. The intuition of kindred spirits. I was drawn toward your Excellency at once."

"You flatter me."

"*S'immagini!* Immediately I said to myself, 'Here is Somebody! An obvious intelligence! Perhaps one of Nietzsche's hard ones! He would know instinctively, for instance, that the soul is just the emotions plus the intellect. That the theological and metaphysical stages of thought are both obsolete already. That science is the religion of the future. But is he a materialist, an agnostic, or an atheist? What does he think of the atomic theory of Democritus? What of Hobbes? Not much of Spinoza, at least, who was called an atheist, though he was, after all, nothing but a pantheist! No matter! How refreshing, a modern mind, here, after such a surfeit of gross, mediæval bigotry, and superstition!'"

This display accomplished, his pointed visage assumed a look of puerile satisfaction. He chattered on:

"Signore, for a year I have famished in this hole! No intercourse for a thinker! Say, no life at all! To what am I reduced? The café, speaking before you with all respect, is a pig-pen, full of pigs—and I teach their litters trash. But the church, at least, is cool. So I go there to read Voltaire. Eh, that amuses me somewhat—to read him there. As you can guess."

"Have you read much of Voltaire, then?"

"If I have read much of him! But then, I am a voracious, an omnivorous, reader——"

"Have you, by any chance, reached that passage where he says, 'If there is no God, one must be invented?'"

The school-master's face fell.

"Voltaire said that? Where? *Per Bacco*, I must see that for myself!"

"Don't let me keep you from looking for it."

"Oh, I prefer to talk with you, Signore!"

"And I, just at present, prefer to be alone."

The man stopped short. An ugly gleam showed for a second in his eyes. But, with a wriggle, he stuttered:

"There I recognize the Superman! Directness, ruthlessness, not fettered by insincere conventions! And I respect it! I admire it! I do homage to it! Another day, then? I live in anticipation."

He made a low bow, displayed a crooked smile, and went off sideways.

"Miserable ass!" growled Sebastian. Then, standing still, he looked round him in whimsical amazement.

"Why, devil take him. . . ."

With a laugh of annoyance, he resumed his homeward way.

In the portico, Ghirlaine was standing, with Fania's baby in her arms. Sebastian halted, to contemplate that picture.

When she saw him, her eyes contracted. She seemed about to go indoors. But, as if against her will, her lips parted:

"How's your shoulder to-day?"

"Doing famously."

"And—the others?"

"They won't trouble us."

Shivering, she pressed the baby closer to her breast. He inquired:

"You've not sighted a steam-boat?"

"No."

"Strange. . . ."

He entered the portico, sank into a chair, and lowered his eyelids.

"You're suffering now?" she asked, reluctantly.

He smiled grimly to himself.

"Not sufficiently to cause you any particular pleasure."

Her face paled. At last, turning quickly, she carried the baby into the house.

The afternoon dragged out interminably. Night fell, hot, breathless, ominous. Next morning, the acolyte climbed half-way up the hill, cast a letter on the ground, and fled.

Don Vigilio wrote that the *Camorrista* was dead. Already the Marshal and one of his carabinieri were stricken down. It was cholera. . . .

Through that day, he sat on the eastern end of the portico, looking down at the village through his binoculars. He was waiting for the storm which, at the coming of such an epidemic, develops, among the ruder peasantry of Italy and Sicily, from blank dismay to a frenzy of destructive terror.

Once, in a hill town of Catania, he had seen a cholera mob roll in upon the doctors and the carabinieri, and tear them limb from limb, because word had gone round that the Government was poisoning the land, in order to thin out a wretched population.

Now he saw again that mass of ragged furies, from whom nearly all semblance of humanity had been obliterated. But their faces were the faces he had seen scowling at him here, in Torregiante, and it was toward him that all those murderous hands reached out.

For, if an outbreak came, all their superstitious hatred of him, all their past mistrust and forebodings, would bring them straightway, with the courage of panic-fear and numbers, howling for vengeance, to this hilltop.

And Ghirlaine! The "wife of the magician!" The "siren," with the "tears of drowned men strung round her neck!" Their savage, fuming minds would attribute this calamity to her no less than to him. They would seek her out with the same fury. For an instant, his imagination brought forth that picture. . . .

Presently, through the binoculars, he saw a group of men walk out from the café, cluster on the esplanade, and gaze up fixedly toward the villa.

She was behind him, on the terrace, stooping over the roses, her figure, in white linen, of an exquisite modernity, her profile, against the golden sky, of a beauty rarer and more delicate than Torregiante had ever seen before.

Across the vivid stretch of flowers, she stared at him, then came quickly toward him.

"What is it? The ship?"

"I wish it were."

When he had told her everything, he handed her the binoculars.



"You can see that they're beginning already to think of us."

Her arms dropped to her side. An expression of horror slowly gathered in her eyes. She managed to utter:

"You're armed?"

"What are a few bullets to a couple of hundred maniacs? For that's what they'll be, when they've worked themselves up to it. . . . If it does break loose, you and Fannia and the baby must get off to the temple. I doubt if even the wildest of them would follow you in there. Annibale could go with you."

"And you?"

"I! Do you think I'd show my back to dogs like these, especially nowadays?"

Her chin rose. Her face was dead-white. But her eyes were burning. And she retorted, in a whisper:

"I shall stay here."

He came close to her, black-browed, quivering with anger. But she did not flinch. She achieved the words:

"Whatever else you may think, you'll find I'm not a coward."

"Are you mad!"

"Perhaps," she returned, faintly. And, closing her eyes, she went swaying toward the house.

He resumed his observation of the village.

From the esplanade all children had disappeared. The loggias were empty. But round the Grand Café of the Sea stood a crowd of men. In the midst of them, flashed the sword-hilts of the two remaining

carabineers. The cocked hats moved as if buffeted about. The islanders were beginning to lose patience with authority?

Out of the eastern sea, the dusk was rising. . . .

Sebastian called Annibale, and put the case to him. The young man's bronzed, classic visage remained almost impassive. Shrugging his shoulders, he remarked:

"Signuri, it may fall out as you think: the Madonna will manage that to suit herself. But as for Fannia and my little Ercole, why should they be afraid of their own people? Or why should I? Still, if those fools want you. . . . *Eccu*: I'll take the Signura to the temple, if she'll let me, and then come back. I eat your bread. I am your man."

"The man of a *jettatura*, of a magician, who has brought the cholera to Torregiante?"

Annibale smiled strangely, with a smile as if of one waking from a long sleep. He responded, reflectively:

"Eh! More things have come to me up here than in all the years I spent down there, Signuri! There is wisdom, it seems, in the neighborhood of the Old Ones. . . ."

He brought the rifle-stock, so that Sebastian could fasten the Mauser automatic to it. But the latter pointed to his bandaged arm. In silence, turn about, they scrutinized the esplanade through the glasses, till night rushed in, and Torregiante melted into a greenish mist beneath the stars.

An hour passed. Out of the shadows:

"Signuri, will you eat?"

"No."

"One meets things better on a full stomach."

"Then go and fill yours."

Annibale's rustling footsteps died away.

Half an hour more. . . .

On the esplanade, torches were beginning to twinkle and converge. In their light, he caught, through the glasses, fragmentary, weird glimpses of flitting figures, gesticulating, gathering, scattering, reassembling.

Hark! . . . A faint rumor, like the murmur of a breeze through leaves. But the night was breathless.

The rumor died away. Yet it soon rose again, intensified, at last distinguishable as the uproar of many voices. A baying deep and savage, like the outcry of a ravening pack.

What was that? The pop of a revolver?

Annibale came running. Side by side, they listened to that clamor, which rose to them, out of the torch-sprinkled darkness, ever louder.

## CHAPTER XIX

IN the villa, at the window of her bedchamber, Ghirlaine, too, was listening.

She heard the distant uproar. She saw, far below, on the beach, as if in an immense black pit, the little flames hurrying together. Undoubtedly, those torches had been kindled to light the way from the village to this headland. It was here, as he had predicted, that the islanders were coming!

From the doorway behind her sounded the quick slapping of bare feet on tiles. Fannia entered, the baby hugged against her breast. Side by side, the two looked forth at the tossing sparks.

Down there, among the torches, was taking shape the most dreadful phenomenon that humanity can show—the Mob, a monster bereft of mind and heart. And to Ghirlaine it seemed as if, from that abyss, were rising all Sebastian Maure's own ruthlessness and lawlessness, returned to rend him, a hundred-fold augmented, out of the Invisible. . . .

"They're coming," said Fannia suddenly.

The torches were pouring down the esplanade, toward the ascent. And, through the still night, there floated up a prolonged and formless howl.

She saw Sebastian approaching, tall, bulky, his bandaged arm dull-gray in the shadows. He came to the window, rested his hand on the sill beside her

own, and for a moment looked in at her in silence. At last:

"You've changed your mind?"

She shook her head.

"You still dream of staying here!"

She nodded.

"In God's name, will you tell me why?"

At the foot of the slope, the lights were already beginning to slip in among the trees. Her fingers came together, and were desperately interlaced. But she only shook her head again.

For a time he still stood there, staring at her white face. Her eyes were on the torches, but she felt his burning scrutiny. Yet not for all the world would she have answered that mute question with the truth—revealing to him her thought that, if she stood her ground, somehow he might find the force to send that onslaught rolling back upon its tracks. . . .

She saw him returning slowly to Annibale.

The young man greeted him with the words:

"They'll be here in five minutes now, Signuri."

"Give them ten, the speed of the slowest. Men stick together who trespass on the property of the Old Ones."

"The ringleaders will probably be old Ilario and Big Paganni. We must get them first. . . . Would you mind, Signuri, taking old Ilario yourself? After all, he's practically my father-in-law, you know."

"And do you imagine that would stop the rest?"

For his part, Sebastian knew that this mob, at least, would not recoil so easily. Its units were men

accustomed all their lives to homicidal impulses and the issue of the knife. Even in their hours of petty gambling and of love-making, they stood ready at any instant to face death. Their honor consisted in contempt of danger, their standard of manhood in accepting every mortal challenge. In their natures were combined the qualities of remote, diverse ancestors: they still contained the cruelty of the ancient Carthaginians, the fanatical bravery of the Arabs, the dogged courage of the Roman legions and the Normans. To shoot down a dozen of them would merely make the rest the more determined and ferocious.

The remaining carabineers were probably too much knocked about to outstrip the mob. The old priest could never keep pace with them. The Syndic? Doubtless hiding in his café. . . . For the first time in his life, Sebastian cursed the defection of the forces of law and order.

But the torches were beginning to send red and yellow flashes through the foliage of the upper slope. And the silence of that progress was more ominous than the former uproar.

"Annibale, get into the house. Bolt the front door and the windows. Stand beside the Signora. Above everything, don't let off that gun. If they seem likely to pass me, carry her out the back door to the temple. Fannia will follow you. By morning, the priest and the police may have them in their senses again. Give her in Don Vigilio's care. Here's my pocket-book. Divide the money into two parts.

One half for that brat of yours. The other half to take the Signura north. Off with you! You've barely time to barricade."

Annibale stepped back aghast.

"You ask me to do that!"

"I order you to take care of the Signura."

"And leave you here!"

"Precisely. There's just one chance, and I can only take it alone. Are you gone?"

The young man's mouth quivered. He gasped:

"Signuri! You command me to be a coward?"

"In Turrigianti, then, it's much braver to let the women be killed?"

Annibale looked toward the house. In the window, dimly, he saw Ghirlaine and Fannia together, and at Fannia's breast the baby. Tears gushed from his eyes. He uttered a whine, like a distracted animal, and beat his deep chest with his clenched fists. Then he made a wild gesture, thrust out one hand, palm down, toward the shifting torch-light, seized Sebastian's hand in a convulsive grip, and ran toward the villa.

The door slammed. Almost immediately, from within, there rose a cry of protest. But with a succession of sharp claps the shutters came together. Silence fell.

Sebastian walked forward to the edge of the hill-top.

Below him, behind a purplish-black net-work of branches, the woods seemed afire. Here and there, through those interstices, a piercing flame leaped

forth, then was quenched by thicker foliage. But among all the taller tree-tops, on the under sides of the stone-pines, up the thick columns of the cypresses, was spreading a glare of smoky crimson.

He fixed his gaze on a point about a hundred yards below, where the path issued into a sort of clearing. Suddenly, this space was full of torches. Their crude radiance reached forth through the night, and played about him. Beneath them he perceived, as it were, a river of men, flowing upward with incredible swiftness. A shout rang out: some one had sighted him. And instantly the stillness was ended by a great crash of voices:

*"Jettatura! Poisoner! Assassin!"*

Now they came even faster, scrambling, jostling, stumbling, and falling in their haste. The trees once more engulfed them. And that was the last screen between them and their prey.

At heart he had ever been practically as much a savage as these savages who sought his life. Now, groping desperately for some defence against them, he found in himself no vestige of that superior moral force by which alone one man in such a situation may triumph over many. He realized his inadequacy—maybe he even glimpsed the reason for it. In that case he should have appreciated the sardonic irony of Fate, which one day, inevitably, confronts us with the peril we might have put to rout, if long ago we had not disarmed ourselves.

He looked up at the blue stars, thinking that whatever happened they would go on shining. He noted



certain constellations. The names of them flashed through his mind, with their peculiarities and distances. He remembered using some of them in a romance, as a decoration, and a means of introducing a passage that one critic had called, "A typical instance of his perversity. . . ."

Hector de Chaumont had complimented him on that passage, simpering in a cravat of old-rose silk and white-linen gaiters. Sangallo had sat there silent, pulling at his short black beard. He saw the room, Andreas Romanovitch's, full of glistening books, and porcelain, and silver boxes, and carved furniture. There were three bottles on the table, of vermouth, absinthe, and brandy. Andreas had just mentioned Ghirlaine Bellamy—her success at a recent charity bazaar. He had seen her there, behind a counter, beside Princess Betty, clad in an exquisite costume of gray, selling hand-painted calendars to a swarm of fashionably dressed men and women. He recalled her smile, her charming manner with those elbowing strangers all excited by their opportunity to treat as saleswomen the members of the Roman aristocracy. He remembered his thought, at that time, "Andreas was right: an uncrowned princess. One who would never find herself amiss in any situation. . . ."

And now she was here, behind him, in this villa—and the mob was at his throat!

From the fringe of trees burst the streaming torches. He heard the panting of a hundred men, the pounding of innumerable feet. All eyes, and

teeth, and rags, and leaping knees, they hurled themselves, like a breaking wave, straight at him.

Even at that last instant, he asked himself:

"Will it be knives, or fists and feet?"

Then, like lightning, a new thought:

"But it can't be either! For she is there, helpless, except for me. . . . We're not yet done with each other. . . . We're not yet done with countless things. . . ."

Was he himself? Was he not something, a part of something, greater than himself? If not, whence grew this sudden, mysterious influx of strength, wit, and reassurance? This conviction, that such an end could not possibly be intended?

Motionless, in the glare of the onrushing torches, he awaited the mob.

Their swarthy faces were distorted wellnigh beyond recognition. Through dangling hair their eyeballs sent forth sharp flashes. Shirts in ribbons revealed chests heaving with fatigue and fury. And the attitudes of all those hurtling legs and arms were extravagant, incredible. Here and there, an arm swung up a club, or brandished a stiletto, as if double-jointed. He saw blackened fingers twisted round the fragment of an oar, the gaps between teeth in a wide-open mouth, the swollen veins of a forehead, the sweat running down a dusky corded neck. Those visages were strangely different, even in the contortion of their frenzy. Some were revealed vividly as Asiatic, others as African, one here and there displayed the pallid convulsion of the Northern

berserk. It seemed as though, in this conglomeration, that was all Sicilian and yet of many peoples, a universal, not a local, vengeance was being hurled at him. The enmity, personified, of all the world. . . .

In every mob, before the final onslaught, there comes one instant, however short, of involuntary recoil, when the wave seems to hang motionless, before the crash.

So, almost within arm's reach, this wave of madmen lost speed, swayed, hesitated, and seemed to settle back upon itself, before engulfing him.

Was it, in this case, his immobility that held them so? Was it their desire to feed their eyes upon this integral thing that they were going to tear to pieces? Or was it the shock of perceiving on his face a smile?

A smile! Not of bitter defiance in the face of death: for they could have understood that sort, and disregarded it. A smile such as they had never seen before, that seemed to say only, "What a phenomenon!"

It was the one look to pierce their frenzy—to make them feel that here was one allied to something, or borne up by something, quite beyond their ken.

His solitary figure, taller apparently than life, stood against the darkness of this hilltop, which had contained for each of them, since childhood, inscrutable and ghastly threats. He seemed, indeed, the evil genius of this place, uncanny in his stillness, inhuman in his look.

The wave quivered again throughout, but did not break.

Then, from the depths of the mob, a red, horizontal point of flame spat at him five times. The shots flew wide. He saw, behind the film of smoke, a familiar visage. And, in the hush that descended abruptly over all, he said:

"Big Paganni, I'm afraid you forgot to nick your bullets with a cross."

It was a tone so sane—almost of ironical reproof—that it affected even those disordered minds. It drew them back a little way toward reality. It recalled to them that somewhere, at one time or other, they had spoken nearly so. It caused an anticlimax.

But their egotism surged up in arms against that anticlimax! Just now they had felt themselves to be terrible, they had gloried in that feeling. They had experienced the frightful exultation of the mob, drunk with the knowledge of its strength. And now they resented passionately this depreciation of their ferocity. Their immediate impulse was to regain the prestige they had lost.

With a growl of gathering volume, they swayed forward.

Instead of flinching, he began to fix first one and then another with his eyes. His gaze rested on old Ilario

"Ilario, you, at least, should have the common-sense and the authority of age. I see you here well in front. I judge you're somewhat a leader of your fellows. Maybe the rest will agree to let you be their spokesman?"

Beneath the glitter of the smoking torches, the old

ruffian blinked, threw back his working face, then barked, while shaking his knife before the other's eyes:

"What we have in our hands speaks well enough for us, assassin!"

The deep semicircle growled again, and moved closer. Sebastian inquired:

"So you've come in the interests of the two strangers whom I discouraged from killing me?"

"Well you know that we've not!"

Cries echoed this retort:

"Tell him, then, Ilario! Tell him what he already knows, before we chop him into bait! Give him his crime and his sentence! We know how to do justice, even to the Devil!"

"By all means," replied Sebastian, "let's give the crime a name, before the execution. It's on Nino's account, perhaps? For I hear that Nino's disappeared—little Nino, the ex-apprentice to the Camorra. But in that case, you would all be related to the Camorra. And that's impossible. You, to dip your hands into such dirty business! For I know that the men of Turrigianti are at least honest men."

Old Ilario stared and stared, till this speech had penetrated his mind. At last, he shook himself, and howled:

"You know what we're here for! The cholera!"

And fifty voices echoed him with a long hoarse clatter:

"The cholera, murderer! The cholera, poisoner!

Poisoner of clean fields! Assassin of little children!  
*Jettatura! Magician!*"

Big Paganni's voice persisted, raving after the others:

"He gave food to my son! Which he had filled with the poison of the cholera. His heart for me!"

The empty revolver clicked thrice, then whizzed past Sebastian's head. And new cries:

"Enough! Enough! Strike, Ilario! Up under his ribs!"

And a seething of men, as those behind struggled to get forward, with the ejaculations:

"One side! Let me through! No one before the others, but all together! None must be cheated of his part!"

An uproar ensued. The crowd boiled and, as it were, turned inside out. New figures appeared suddenly in the foreground, glaring, crouching, their countenances strangely elongated by menace, to encounter his eyes.

He said:

"I see. The cholera has come to Turrigianti. And naturally, you want to drive it out. But by yourselves you feel incapable of that. So, since you think I may be able to help you, you turn to me. You come to me with this proposition, 'Either help us to drive out the cholera, or we'll do for you here and now.'"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But that wasn't necessary. Two of us were drowning in the sea, and men of Turrigianti saved us.

We came to shore helpless, and Turrigianti took us in. We received your hospitality. We fell in your debt. Yet, when the chance comes for me to try to repay that debt, you misdoubt my willingness to do so.

"You might have sent one man to say: 'The cholera is here. We have no hope. We shall die like flies, as other villages have died, unless some one comes quickly to our aid. But you have seen many lands, in their health and in their sickness. Do you know something of the mystery of this plague? Can you help us?'

"To that one man I would have replied, as I reply now to all of you, with your weapons in your hands: 'I will help you. Together we will drive out this cholera.'"

He put out his free hand, with the Sicilian gesture of oath-taking, and repeated:

"We will drive it out together."

Their faces were filled with blank amazement. In the expression of all those open mouths and protruding eyes, there was something grotesquely childish. After all, they were children! They had been children all the while!

His habitual sense of mastery returned to him. He felt again the exhilaration of power over others.

But old Ilario commenced to recover. He panted: "*Sangu di Baccu!* And you, who brought it!"

"You think I brought the cholera? *Mai 'cchiu!* Ilario, you have more intelligence than that. You know well it was the jugglers from Naples."

The ancient, dancing on his old feet, both arms raised above his head, screamed in Sebastian's face:

"Do you suppose nobody has seen you walking through our fields, behind the village, poisoning them!"

"With what, for the love of God?"

"How should I know about your magic, accursed magician!"

"You, who hardly know me, call me that? Why not ask Annibale and Fannia, who happen to know me well?"

"Those animals! You've bewitched them! You have their bodies and souls, and make of them what you like!"

Sebastian tapped the old man on the chest.

"You talk like an imbecile. Are we grown men, or children? Is this rubbish the best thing we can find to wrangle over, when every life on this island is in danger?"

"Through you," hissed Ilario, and, with a snake-like movement, struck at Sebastian with his knife. The latter's hand flashed up and caught the arm of the fisherman in mid-air. Holding the ancient thus, Sebastian turned to the others. He went on, as if nothing had happened:

"I advise you, if you value your health, to go home. To shut yourselves up, each with his own family. To wash your hands well in hot water. To eat and drink nothing. By sunrise, when I've seen Don Vigilio, I shall be with you. Then we'll begin to fight this cholera.



"That is, if you do as I advise. Otherwise, I shall not be responsible. Your own obstinacy will destroy you, and your wives, and your children, till no one is left in Turrigianti to bury the dead. It's obedience and life, or disobedience and death. Take your choice."

A groan broke from old Ilario. His knees bent; his muscles cracked; his knife fell from his fingers. Sebastian released him, turned on his heel, and went, without looking back, through the shadows to the villa.

Annibale unbarred the door. Inside, the lights were all extinguished. Sebastian traversed the black corridor to Ghirlaine's room, and knocked.

Her low voice answered:

"Come in."

He passed the threshold which he had not crossed since that night of tempest and madness.

Ghirlaine and Fannia drew back from the window, and leaned against the wall. He peered out, through the loop-holes in the shutters. He perceived, on the edge of the hilltop, the dripping torches clustered all together, and beneath them the close-packed heads. A racket of contending voices came to him. Some phrases were distinct:

"All lies! . . . But what he has brought he can be frightened into taking away? . . . If we kill him to-night, it goes on. . . . Let him lift the spell, then, the son of ten thousand dogs! . . ."

Big Paganni's voice:

"He gave poisoned food to my son! . . ."

"Is your son sick?"

"Not yet——"

"Then hold your tongue for the present. He shall make us all safe, or die. Every poisoner has his remedies, to protect himself. . . ."

Sebastian lighted a cigarette, and volunteered:

"They'll soon be going now."

At times, some voice rose shrill above the rest in protest:

"And *I* say he has duped us! His work is done. As soon as our backs are turned, he and the woman will slip down the cliffs and walk away, over the sea, as they came!"

"If they could do that, they would have done it while we were climbing. . . ."

And the still room was penetrated by old Ilario's bark:

"Cowards! To let the net slip, when the fish are in it! I go after him now. Who follows?"

The crowd parted, and he emerged, with waving arms, and made for the house. The rest stood watching him. When he had come half-way, he halted, looked behind him, and retraced his steps, with a volley of oaths. The others received him with sarcasm:

"*Sicuru!* You have no children! . . ."

Sebastian left the window.

"It's over," he said.

Crossing the room with dragging feet, Ghirlaine sank upon the bed. He seated himself in the chair.

Long minutes passed. . . .

Fannia turned from the window.

"Look, Signuri!"

The torches were gone. Only a faint radiance remained among the tree-tops of the slope.

Annibale entered with a lighted candle, and set it on the chest of drawers. Then, bending forward, his face hidden behind his arms, he began to weep. In long, shivering sobs, the words escaped him:

"I am a coward! . . . I am a coward! . . . I've hidden behind women's skirts! . . ."

Raising his head, he cast a swimming look at the baby, asleep in Fannia's arms.

"And my son has been witness of it!"

Oblivious to Sebastian's involuntary grin, he stumbled into the corridor. But Fannia sped after him, her cry re-echoing:

"Annibale! Annibale! . . ."

Sebastian turned to Ghirlaine.

She was staring at him, her cheeks colorless, her eyes brilliant with the brilliancy of fever. From her countenance all pride and strength had disappeared, and that change was startling. Her beauty, despite its ravagement, was a new beauty infinitely more poignant than the old, as if a veil which had always shrouded it had at last been lifted.

On the edge of the bed, supported by one arm, her lithe shape seemed sinking backward in surrender to emotional exhaustion. Her hair, transformed into spun gold by the candle-light, her misty, unnaturally shining eyes, her half-parted lips that had never known this enigmatical contour, made her appear like a woman he had never seen before.

And at that moment he seemed as strange to her

as she to him. His clothes, his immediate surroundings, appeared unspeakably incongruous. That dark countenance, that big figure, should have been framed in iron or in skins—in the costume of some other age, to which he really belonged. For did not this modern body hold a spirit straight out of the tumultuous and violent past—such a being as those who, once on a time, were wont to grapple joyously with fate at its moment of high strength, and return, victorious, unscathed because of their very contempt of death, to find waiting for them the instinctive welcome of the ages?

She seemed for an instant to see him so, and to feel, in her heart, an infinitely simpler sensation—an impulse reasonless, reckless, absolutely primitive. . . . What mad dream was she slipping into?

All the hushed night seemed waiting for his next utterance.

He said:

"I think I, instead of Annibale, have been the coward, to frighten you so for nothing."

Then, as if he had just realized that they were alone, he stood up.

"Well, rest assured, that at least is done for. . . . Good-night."

Her eyes followed him to the door. It came shut behind him.

And she woke.

Whom had she been! . . .

## CHAPTER XX

HALF an hour later, Don Vigilio reached the villa.

The climb, and his anxiety, had worn him out. On his way, he had encountered the islanders returning, and his denunciation of them had left deep wounds in his soft old heart. Sitting in the portico, like a scant sack of meal inside his rusty cassock, he explained feebly to Sebastian:

"For after all, my son, it's like beating a horse for taking fright and bolting. God made these poor folk incredibly nervous, under their stolidity. And today's developments just finished them."

Already, besides the carabineers, a fisherman had shown the first symptoms, while two women were prostrated by the "false cholera" that is induced by fright. Sebastian remarked:

"We must begin as soon as you're able to return."

"Begin! Without doctors? Without remedies?"

"There is no specific remedy for cholera. One can only isolate the cases, make a system of hygiene for the rest to follow, and experiment with the various treatments. Diet, friction, hot baths, and so on. Such palliatives as opium, valerianate, calomel, quinine, tannin, lactic acid."

Don Vigilio groaned:

"None of those things, not one, in Torregiante!"

"I must see what I can do myself in the way of lactic acid and tannin. . . . Camphor?"

The old man raised his shoulders helplessly. But abruptly he started. In a whisper:

"Under the altar, in the leaden case that contains Saint Giosuè's garments! The robes are packed in camphor!"

"Camphor balls?"

"No, no, no! Gum camphor! Pure chunks of it!"

"Good enough. Who shall say that Saint Giosuè may not perform new miracles?"

Don Vigilio nodded in amazement.

"You are right," he assented, simply. "Who, indeed?" He rose to his feet, his frail figure galvanized by hope. "It is a reproof to my despair, my lack of faith, my miserable panic!"

"But camphor alone, you understand, isn't everything!"

"Never mind: it is a sign to begin with. As for the rest, inspiration will surely answer effort. Let us go down now! Let us at least begin! . . ."

They descended the hillside.

On the slope, they met a carabineer ascending. He was a private, from some far-off northern province, young, blond, his face disfigured by a half-dry cut. His cocked hat was gone. His smart uniform was torn and dirty. He limped painfully, using his sword-scabbard for a cane. The mob, before starting to the headland, had set on him and his com-

panion savagely. His comrade was in the police station with a broken leg. He, for his part, was struggling up the hill to find out how the villa folk had fared.

Said Sebastian:

"You'd best finish your climb, and let my people care for you."

The youth drew himself up and saluted. His pale face was calm and proud. He did not forget that he was a carabineer, and the last effective representative of law in Torregiante.

"Since you are safe, I will return with your Excellency and the *Reverendo*."

Sebastian supporting him with his free arm, they continued down the hill.

The esplanade was crowded. All the village seemed gathered there, round the little shrines set high in the corners of the houses, to-night lighted with many tapers, and heaped up with flowers and pinchbeck jewelry. The tiny, flickering flames illuminated the drawn faces and drooping figures. Every countenance was stamped with that sense of tragedy which no visage can show more vividly than the Sicilian.

As the new-comers approached, the islanders drew back, with sullen mutterings. One harpy in a loggia reached forth her claws and screamed an hysterical imprecation. Don Vigilio looked up at her, smiled gently, and answered, in his thin, quavering voice, that all of them involuntarily associated with the mysteries of birth, death, and immortality:

"Have patience, my daughter. We are here to help you."

The woman shrank back.

Before the Grand Café of the Sea, they found the Syndic, brick-red in the lamp-light, his eyes protruding more than ever from confusion, cringing, as it were, behind his walrus's mustache. He began to stammer excuses. He had gone to sleep early in the back of his house. He was a tremendous sleeper. The uproar had not even waked him. If only he had known!

Sebastian clapped him on the shoulder.

"Of course. If only you had, you might have passed them half a dozen words of common-sense, and saved them their trip up and down."

"Ah, Body of Bacchus, it is true—they must have been completely mad! A word from me, as you say. . . . But, *Madrecidda*, as any one can tell you, when once I start snoring, they might shoot off cannons. . . ."

They took him with them, still boggling at his explanations, toward the parish-house.

On the way, they came across a lean shadow skulking along beside the house walls. It was the school-master.

The "starved rat," checked in his endeavor to slink off home, managed to compose his features. Slipping to Sebastian's side, he whispered, as they proceeded:

"All my felicitations, Excellency. It was tremendous!"



"What was tremendous?"

"Capers—your treatment of these pigs! I was there! I didn't make my presence known, because I knew perfectly how it would turn out. I went along, because I was curious to see the humiliation of ignorance by intellect. Such a spectacle is so refreshing, so heartening, while we are waiting for the final, great humiliation of ignorance—of all these old, worn-out governments and religions! . . . All the same, when you'd turned your back on them, I did my little part. Quite unnecessary, certainly; but I couldn't resist a few additional sarcasms. Perhaps they had their small effect, in hastening those *cretini* to make up what they call their minds?"

"Many thanks, I'm sure."

"Nothing, Excellency! We others, you see! The freemasonry of intellect!"

They arrived at the parish-house. The Syndic was shouting at the priest, in his effort to make his tale convincing once for all:

"The whole house will tell you that when once I begin to play the *ritirata* on my nose, they might kill a pig under my bed. . . ."

The school-master, drawing Sebastian aside, inquired secretly, with a febrile eagerness:

"Excellency, may one ask how you plan to get away?"

Sebastian looked down steadily into those shifty eyes. The fellow, smiling craftily, explained:

"Of course, I understood all that talk up there! The wool over their eyes, *et cetera*! But naturally,

the intellects of the future mustn't run the risk of succumbing to the suicidal squalor of the past. So I thought, when you slip away, we might go together?"

Sebastian uttered a short laugh.

"Signor School-master, no one is going to slip away from Turrigianti till the cholera is finished, or till the cholera has finished us. For you, for Don Vigilio, for the Syndic, and, by chance, for me, the programme has arranged itself automatically. After you, my friend."

And he pushed the other, suddenly all limp and pallid, into the parish-house.

Round the table in the priest's dismal little sitting-room, they came finally to agreement. Sebastian, to whom the rest deferred instinctively, apportioned the necessary tasks.

The carabineer was to direct the policing of the wells, and guard the cleanliness of the water-front. The Syndic was to have all rations prepared in his cook-shop, protected from flies, and served out to the village. The school-master was to see that no other food was eaten, and to burn, or disinfect if they came on disinfectants, the belongings of the victims. Sebastian and Don Vigilio were to isolate and care for the sick, and order the burial of the dead. It was the priest who suggested turning the parish-house into a hospital.

"For, as a matter of fact," he said, "this is the only house, I'm sure, that they'd consent to be removed to." And turning to Sebastian: "Alas, we're going to fight more than cholera! We have against

us I don't know what lethargy and fatalism! You will see men refuse to take the measures that mean life to them! You will see women try to stop us from doing things they can't understand, to save their children for them! It's going to be a nightmare! A nightmare of poor wretches bent on destroying themselves! . . ."

And the struggle which began that night was, indeed, a nightmare.

In that squalor and promiscuity of living, the plague spread rapidly. On the second day—a day of unprecedented heat and breathlessness—the carabineer private and two fishermen were dead, while a dozen others had reached their crises.

Toward evening, a swarm of men and women swept down the esplanade, climbed the eastern promontory, and poured into the church. For two days, their tongues licking the dust, they had prayed to Saint Giosuè to save them from this witchcraft, and he had done nothing. The diminutives, terms of endearment and supplication, with which they had addressed him hitherto, gave place, in that frantic rush, to blasphemy and obscenity. In the sacred edifice, packed in a howling mass about the little chapel where his picture hung, they hurled at him their worst abuse, clods of mud, all manner of actual and verbal filth. A rock struck the ancient portrait in the face, split the panel, and knocked it down among the brass candle-sticks and paper flowers of the altar. Instantly, all was silence, immobility. The rioters stared at their work, as at a frightful omen. Then a

woman wailed, and set loose the reaction. More terror-stricken than before, they poured out of the church, with sobs and cries to the Madonna and the Saint for pardon. They scattered, as fast as their legs would carry them, to their houses, and bolted themselves in.

They refused to come out and get the food prepared for them. If it was brought to their doors, they threw down tiles and rocks from the upper windows on the "poisoner and his dupes." Now and then, when the cholera-fighters drew off baffled, a shot followed them, or the cries:

"Don Vigilio, stand aside! Give us a chance at the big one!"

For they counted on some sort of magic from Sebastian that would bring them instantaneous relief. This manner of doing revived their worst suspicions. Yet they hardly dared to kill him even now, for fear that with him they would be destroying their last chance.

In their grimy rooms, with swine and chicken underfoot, amid a cloud of flies, they ate green fruit, raw milk, fish caught close to shore. Only the clean vegetables of their terraces they would not touch. But with the wild prodigality of fatalists who see death imminent, they slaughtered and devoured their pigs, which had been rooting in the refuse of the alleys and the water-front.

The domiciliary visits ended, more often than not, in miniature riots. The well fought to keep the rescuers from the bedsides of the sick. Argument

was useless before the stubborn belief, reiterated by screeching voices, that Sebastian wanted to remove the patients in order to finish them at his ease. Even the priest was hustled, his words drowned out by howls:

"You are old! You are simple! He has fooled you! What do you know!"

And the women, beside the pallets of their husbands, became viragoes, and led on their half-grown children, armed with kitchen-knives and hatchets. When they had been disarmed, the carrying of the terror-stricken invalid to the parish-house was a running battle.

They had pressed into service some half a dozen young men, who had lived their army-terms in Italy, and realized the stupidity of their fellows. Without such aid, indeed, Sebastian and his co-workers could have accomplished nothing. But they were perilously few: for three had been sent off, in a sail-boat, to Sicily in search of help. The rest, however, showed the bravery and obedience of good soldiers.

As for the school-master, he was practically useless. For two days he pretended to go about his duties. On the third, as he was pulling a mattress from a house to burn it, the inmates set on him with clubs, and beat him black and blue. Groaning, showing his teeth at Sebastian and Don Vigilio, cursing them and the universe at large, he dragged himself home, to the top of a ramshackle building near the parish-house, and stayed there.

The "walrus," on the other hand, surprised even

himself by his devotion. In the depths of his cook-shop, before his long range covered with gaudy, Moorish-looking tiles and set with little charcoal pits, from time to time he stood motionless, to cry:

*"Corpu di Baccu! Am I the Syndic of Turrigianti, or a galley-slave?"*

Then he plunged once more to the cooking of food that none but the cholera-fighters, and the invalids in the parish-house, could be brought to touch. And, amid the steam, his fat body, stripped to the waist, was reflected, in its lumbering energy, from a score of copper pots.

Twice a day, the smoking dishes, of spaghetti, of broth, of barley-gruel, were carried, covered with sterilized linen, to the parish-house.

There all the rooms were full of pallets, on which the sufferers lay. Immobile on their backs, they turned up to the dim light their bluish visages, sharpened, sunken, marked one and all with a half-dreamy conviction of a fatal outcome. The place was calm, with the calmness of a region removed almost beyond the confines of the natural world. For the patients, at their first seizure, had accepted dissolution as a certainty, while the nurses, who saw the plague spreading despite their hardest efforts, worked on with the quietude of a profound despair.

Even old Maria, the housekeeper, moved softly, and achieved the miracle of a whisper. And it seemed that day and night that violent-featured, obese old harridan was everywhere, with steaming blankets, bottles, and gentle hands. She took Sebastian's orders without resentment. Now and then,

when they rose together from a bedside, baffled again by death, she said to him, while blinking back the tears from eyes long unused to moisture:

*"Curragiu, Signuri! Next time? . . ."*

When a crisis was safely passed, a thrill of hope ran among the fighters. Forthwith, the news was carried from the promontory to the village. But the islanders, glowering down from their loggias at the messenger, replied:

"A trick! To persuade us we have a chance to live, when once he's got us there!"

Sometimes, at night, shouting from house to house, they planned an onslaught on the hospital. The sick should be rescued and brought home. The priest was in his dotage; he should be locked up. As for Sebastian, he should be torn to pieces.

The Syndic came out of the café, and roared at them:

"Imbeciles! It's you who are murdering your own children!"

Wine-flasks and dishes crashed round him. He retreated into his tunnel.

In the darkness, on the esplanade, tragic tableaux frequently took shape. A mother lying prostrate on the ground before a niche that held a penny print of the Madonna. A ragged man seated on the pavement, groaning in his first seizure, while from all the windows round about his neighbors watched him silently, in horror. Or, to the thin tinkle of a bell, the passing of the Host, to some dwelling so well defended that the sick had not been removed.

Through the shadows, a point of flame. The lit-

tle acolyte, in a torn surplice, bell and candle in hand. After him, Don Vigilio, vested, bare-headed, holding before him the *Santissimo*. His fragile face very old and tired-looking, but exalted, now that he had this Emblem in his hands, by an expression of almost fanatical hope. His pace faltering from weariness, but always recovering its speed. For the soul toward which he was hurrying must not go unshriven of its offences.

In the loggias, in the doorways, before the wooden lattices, and the beached sail-boats looming against the stars, the islanders sank down upon their knees, as the *Santissimo* went by. For the moment, they forgot everything but that symbol of supreme rescue, which Don Vigilio alone could bring to them.

And, as he returned, perhaps they would call to him, in altered tones:

"Take care of yourself, little *Padri*. We can't spare you. We, too, shall need you presently. . . ."

Sebastian, also, took the priest to task concerning his exertions.

"At your age, you know, one can't stand this forever, without going under. Now will you leave all this to me for a while, and get a decent rest?"

Don Vigilio smiled gently.

"Thank you, my son. I'll take an hour off. I'll go into the church, and celebrate the Mass. That will refresh me more than sleep."

At the door, he paused to ask:

"And you? How long do you expect to keep on so?"



Sebastian reflectively crunched a piece of Saint Giosuè's camphor, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Till the doctors come, I fancy."

"And you, who haven't my support, are no more afraid than tired?"

"Afraid! Of course I am! Every time I put anything into my mouth! Almost as much afraid, I should judge, as the hermit, up yonder. Who, as you may have noticed, jolly well keeps out of it. . . . Still, I'm just a trifle less afraid of the cholera than I am of being thought afraid of it."

But there flashed through his mind the words of Andreas Romanovitch, at the start of the fox-hunt in the Roman Campagna: "Many men sacrifice themselves before the altar of public opinion. . . ."

He recalled that vivid winter day—the rolling, golden landscape, the brilliant cavalcade, the sudden rush of hounds and horses, Ghirlaine amid the scudding uniforms, her slim, black-clad figure swaying to the rhythm of the gallop. . . . Then the herdsman's shelter, the bench before the hut, the faint scent of leather and orris-root that came to him from her. . . . His return to the city, determined more than ever to possess her, despite all her enmity. . . .

And that determination had brought them, finally, to this!

Yet he would not have gone back. He would not have avoided one hour of bafflement and remorse. The injuries that he had inflicted on her hung about his neck with an almost insupportable weight, but he could not, even now, have brought himself to lessen

them, if in lessening them the memory of all this bitter-sweet intimacy would have to be wiped out.

Nor, in fact, could he conceive of the possibility of having acted otherwise. The most unbelievable of those hours had for him, at retrospection, the naturalness of absolute necessity.

"*Padre*," he said, aloud, "I begin to believe in destiny, you know."

"That is well, my son," the priest answered, quietly. "Always remembering, however, that destiny is only another name for opportunity—that the final choice invariably remains with us."

There were hours when the epidemic, so to speak, stood still—when crises were lacking, and the work became easier. In such breathing-spells, Sebastian would climb occasionally to the western headland, for a glimpse of the villa, and, perhaps, of her.

But he would not come near the villa. He kept even Annibale at a distance, while repeating his orders for the regimen of the household. He was determined that there should not be the slightest contact between the headland and the village.

Then, when he had finished with instructions:

"And the Signura?"

"*Accusi—accusi—so-so.*"

"She—talks much?"

"Not much, Signuri."

"And how does she spend her time?"

"Eh! Looking through the glasses, usually. First at the village, then at the sea. At the sea, when ships are in sight."

"Ah. At the sea, when ships are in sight. . . . Very well. *Arrividirchi*, Annibale."

"*Arrividirchi*, Signuri," the young man responded, sadly. "And the Madonna go with you, as we pray she may."

Perhaps, while talking so, he saw her for a moment, in the portico, tall and straight in her white dress, gazing down at him. But she never moved while he was looking at her. Yet, if he turned away for an instant, she was gone.

Descending from the confines of that pure, inaccessible place, to the inferno of the cholera town, he would tell himself:

"What a waste of ingenuity, for theologians to have devised a hell and a heaven so remote!"

Those days, he had many new thoughts.

She, too. . . .

On the headland, she could feel, if she could not see, the full ghastliness and peril of the drama being played below. Cholera! Her imagination painted scenes worse, almost, than reality. She pictured the despair, the agonies of the victims suddenly struck down, the grief of the survivors, overshadowed by an augmented dread. At mid-day, the yellow mist that hung round the village seemed like the emanation of a vast hopelessness and anguish. It spread along the slopes. It lost itself amid the groves. It seemed to be creeping upward toward the heights. She was frightened, as if it contained the infection of its source. And yet, staring down through the haze, she felt a strange impulse, not to recoil, but to de-

scend—to throw herself into the midst of that disaster!

Her physical safety, her inactivity, shamed her. Her past appeared before her in all its aimlessness. And her many conventional charities seemed like a mockery, now brought into comparison with the charity of those who, down there in the village, were braving death to battle for the lives of others. All the money she had ever given through benevolence, out of her inexhaustible store, could not outweigh one gesture of the shapes she seemed to see beside the cholera beds. She had only given what she had no right to give.

She remembered Sebastian's words before the temple. "A creature who had always taken everything, and really returned nothing." Again the speech sounded in her ears: "You and I—a couple of parasites together! . . ."

But to-day he was paying back his debt. To-day, at least in this, he was her superior!

All her conventional instincts revolted against such thoughts.

"How should it be otherwise! This is man's work. Such horrors for me? Such creatures, in their most abject states?"

She was expressing the conviction not only of the women of her kind, but of the men as well—that her whole province should be above all contact with material degradation, that any such contact would somehow have depreciated her value. . . . Yet suppose that, instead of stooping to such contact, one had to rise!

Presently, however:

"Why should I have this insane impulse? My life has been prepared for other things!"

A voice within her seemed to ask:

"For what?"

To that challenge, she flung back, as it were from her innermost defences:

"If for nothing else, at least for the assurance of a superior race!"

But the voice within replied:

"What sort of superiority? To your children what legacy of impulse will you offer? . . ."

She fled to the companionship of Fannia. Still, into their dismal, halting conversations there intruded the shadow of reproach. This poor woman, with her ragged dress and bare feet, her eagerness for humble service, her dumb devotion, was one of them!

At times she questioned Fannia, to find out if these urgencies were unique.

"How do you feel, when you think that down there people are dying?"

"How should I feel, Signura! Glad it's not us! Afraid for the Signuri. Yes, and for my father too. . . ."

"If you knew your father had caught it, would you go down?"

"Go down! Holy Virgin! One's baby, I take it, is worth more than one's father. You may not know that, Signura. But you will, when you have one."

Ghirlaine took the sleeping infant from Fannia's

arms. Holding him against her firm bosom, she touched the little face, and uncurled the tiny fingers. For her, remembering those first hours of his, and her share in them, there was pride in the feeling that in some way he belonged also to her. When she saw him at Fannia's breast, she envied the mother her emotions. She realized that then the peasant-woman was complete, while she, for all her individuality and beauty, was not. And at such moments she longed for that completeness, with an intensity she had never known up there, with a fervor that had needed, as it seemed, the fierce influences of nature, on this Isle of Life, to develop so fully.

She fell to thinking of Fannia's romance.

Here its lawlessness did not seem reprehensible. The spontaneity of that revolt against all obstacles, the supreme defiance of tradition hereabouts, had the nobility of Nature. The laws of men fell short of this high headland. . . .

This headland, apart from all the world! Was its isolation ever going to end?

Where was Sangallo? Why had he not yet followed that strange letter of his? This suspense, added to the suspense of all the rest!

Sometimes, from the northern ridge, she descried on the ambiguous horizon a faint thread of smoke. Her heart leaped to her throat. She turned faint. They were coming?

Beyond the cataclysm of their arrival, her mind could picture nothing.

But the thread of smoke gradually died away.

She returned to the villa, all unnerved, exhausted—but like a person reprieved from a crisis too tremendous to be faced.

Frequently, amid the blossom-covered labyrinths behind the house, she came on Annibale. The young man would snatch off his torn hat with the gesture of a cavalier. If she was going to the northern side, he would accompany her. He, too, was interested in distant smoke.

The *Camorristi* still obsessed him. He was convinced that more would come. He explained to her that it was not like them to accept defeat. The *vendetta* was their dearest point of honor.

Nodding solemnly, he would repeat:

“They will surely send again, Signura, when the others fail to return. They will send and send, till Turrigianti swarms with them. But next time, I think, they’ll send some one better than the jugglers, as the jugglers were better than Nino. They will honor us ever with a better grade of talent. Eh, after all, a compliment, in its way?”

On which, straightening himself, and smiling amiably, he would add:

“But don’t disturb yourself on that account, Signura! My master will know how to attend to them, as I shall know how to help him. There is one, with your leave, who was hardly meant to be killed by ordinary people! Or, in my private opinion, by the cholera! Every night I say my prayer for him to Our Lady and the Blessed Saints, that he mayn’t be struck down. Yet when I see him again, walking

upright, I feel as if I might better have saved my breath to cool my macaroni. To myself I say, 'The cholera! *Mai 'cchiu!* What is that to him?' For, without compliments, he has that look, you know! One can't imagine him lying helpless on a bed, or going to his own funeral!"

But Ghirlaine, for her part, never glimpsed Sebastian on the hillside without a sudden tenseness, an instant of giddy relaxation, and the thought, "Again?" That he was still afoot, after all those days of horror, seemed to her miraculous.

When he looked up toward her, over the cactus-hedges, she imagined his face set in a bitter smile. She fancied that he was grimly considering the pettiness of his past infatuation, in comparison with his present business. He wore the old suit of frieze, the old wooden-soled shoes, the shapeless felt hat, of the first days. His face was deeply bronzed. He had lost weight. He seemed like a stranger.

One morning she noticed that he had discarded his bandages and sling. In talking to Annibale, he made gestures with his left arm. It seemed as well as ever.

She watched him all the way down the hill-path, through the binoculars. He moved like a man very tired.

Intently, she followed his progress along the esplanade. A fat fellow came out of the café, and gesticulated. From the eastern promontory, two young men ran down to join them. The four turned to look out to sea.

The steam-boat was rounding the headland.



## CHAPTER XXI

THE steam-boat stood off the beach. The two young men rowed Sebastian and the Syndic out to it. From them the captain learned of the cholera in Torregiante.

Then the fishing-boat, which had gone for help, had not reached Trapani?

"Signuri, at Trapani we've seen no one from here," the captain answered gravely, from the rail.

"But it's impossible! They left three days ago!"

"Then they've gone on to Palermo. There's some cholera at Palermo. There must be government doctors there. No doubt a passing sail-boat told them so."

"Fools! They could have telegraphed from Trapani, and saved two days!"

"Eh, to be sure! But it takes brains to think. However, I'll send that telegram for you, on my return."

The captain shouted toward the engine-room:

"Let us go!"

And, to the occupants of the rowing-boat:

"I'm off. This place is infected. If I have communication with it, I shall be quarantined from Trapani."

The steamer was moving. But a man who had

been leaning over the rail picked up a valise and made for the ladder. The captain remonstrated violently:

"You heard what they said? Do you want to catch it, too?"

"I don't catch things easily," the stranger responded, with a pleasant smile. And descending the ladder, he motioned politely to the rowers. They took him aboard. He sat down beside Sebastian with an apology, and a winning gesture.

He was perhaps forty years old, tall, swarthy, very ugly, yet with a certain attractiveness of features—that expression which the Italians call *simpatica*. He looked calm, strong, accustomed to authority. He was fastidiously dressed: his blue flannel suit, silk shirt, flowing tie of foulard, yellow shoes, and panama hat, were the last cry of Neapolitan fashion. On his long fingers glittered some expensive rings, the jewels principally emeralds, sapphires, and rubies. His magnificence awed the islanders. To Sebastian, his face was vaguely familiar.

They discussed the cholera. Sebastian informed him, indifferently:

"The whole place is a pest-house. Those of us who aren't down with it are practically dehumanized. I doubt you'll find your visit either profitable or pleasant?"

The stranger returned, genially:

"It isn't a visit of pleasure anyway, Signore. I come to Torregiante to say and hear a lot of disagreeable things, I fear. . . . In fact, I've come to visit

my brother, and persuade him that he's making a fool of himself."

"Your brother!" ejaculated the Syndic, in amazement.

"Exactly. My brother. Whom you probably call the hermit."

The eyes of the Syndic and the boatmen turned toward the little hut of bowlders, thatched with prickly-pear leaves, high on the eastern ridge—then fixed themselves again on the jewelry and fine clothes of this astounding individual. But Sebastian did not cease to watch the stranger's face. Where had he seen it before?

Suddenly, he recalled an afternoon at Naples, in the Villa Nazionale. Dusk was falling: along the wooded promenade beside the sea long chains of clear white lights were springing forth. The roadways were full of the carriages of the *aristocrazia*. Through this traffic he, in the shadowy depths of a big limousine, was speeding out toward the Scoglio di Frisio, for a gay dinner-party. Beside him sat a pretty woman who knew every one, but whom, in an Anglo-Saxon country, ostensibly nobody would have known. And all at once she had shrunk back, pressed his hand, and cautiously designated a tall horseman, approaching on the bridle-path. "*Ecco, caro mio!*" It is Angelo Cristofores, one of the ten chiefs of the Camorra."

And at this moment, in the rowing-boat before Torregiante, Angelo Cristofores was offering him a cigarette from a gold case set with rubies.

Sebastian smiled inwardly.

"These cigarettes are excellent."

"So glad, Signore."

And the stranger began to talk, with engaging frankness, about "his brother's foolishness."

He had been an odd fish from the first, that brother! He had been offered repeated opportunities to enter a highly profitable business. The young simpleton had refused: his leanings were rather toward the church. Though where he had got that idea, Heaven only knew!

"That is, most of his leanings were in that direction. There were a few that held him back. Or rather, seemed to. In the end, they pushed him into this condition. . . ."

In short, he had become infatuated with a woman who had treated him badly. His illusions destroyed, he had renounced the world. He had, indeed, renounced the world "excessively." He had "become a recluse, in the barest, most remote, God-forsaken spot that he could find.

"And all that, Signore, for a woman that you or I would be tempted to beat half to death and throw into the street. A foolish baby-face! A voice, to be sure—but who can't shake out a song or two? Perhaps you've heard of her, however. She's wriggled upward, since then, kicking away the men she climbed over, one by one. I mean Fiammetta Innocenti. You know her, possibly?"

"I've heard her sing, somewhere or other."

The rowing-boat grounded on the beach.

"Not much, eh? But enough to turn a certain style of man into a donkey. In this case, let's hope not permanently. That's what I'm here to find out."

The stranger leaped out upon the sand. He was evidently muscular and agile, as well as clever. "But perhaps," thought Sebastian, "it really is his brother. That would account for his coming all this way himself. Two birds with one stone!"

Aloud, he said:

"I wish you all success in your visit, Signore."

"So kind of you!"

"There's the place, on the ridge. Say fifteen minutes' climb. For accommodations, I'm sure the Syndic can put you up somewhere. Indeed, his house is the only safe one now. And we can't let anything happen to you in Torregiante."

"A thousand thanks!"

The stranger doffed his panama hat, made a sweeping bow, and set off, skirting the village, toward the uplands. Sebastian, gazing after him, reflected:

"Real talent this time, I should say. They begin to flatter me!"

But in the hours that followed he had small opportunity to think of this new menace.

The epidemic was rising to its climax. In the moist heat, with the sea undisturbed by any breeze, the noxiousness of the water-front had developed frightfully. And in the infected warrens of the village, from behind the barred doors, on the terraces screened with poles, driftwood, and scrub, there

issued from time to time fresh outbursts, of shrieks and lamentations, that signalled another seizure or another death.

Old Ilario was down. They carried him on a shutter, glaring like a trapped wolf, to the parish-house.

The school-master, on sighting the steamer, had scrambled down from his eyry, determined to escape. But at the door, he had fallen with a groan. There they found him, his long, bony legs spread out on the threshold, his head against the second step, and in his eyes blank fright. They put him on the pallet beside old Ilario's, across from the door of the kitchen, where Maria, puffing, wheezing, calling on all manner of saints, was perpetually sterilizing sheets and blankets.

The Marshal of carabinieri, however, was better. That big, ruddy man, with the blonde mustache and girlish skin, was a shadow of his former self, but to-day almost cheerful. When Sebastian approached his bed, his lips parted in a languid smile. In a voice affected by aphonia:

"How strange, Signore! . . . You have become the law in Torregiante."

It was true. Since Don Vigilio had collapsed from weariness, Sebastian had become the law in Torregiante!

He now directed everything, was everywhere, learned by mistakes, and sometimes evolved a triumph from defeat. A new burst of energy had followed his first lassitude. Now he was moved by that

reserve of strength which the human organism is not conscious of, till absolute necessity for its use arises. He exulted in his hitherto unguessed capacity for labor and for use.

The horrors of this conflict left him cold. He felt no active sympathy either with the suffering or the grief. To him it was just a battle, against a force more subtle and ruthless than himself. He had always been a good fighter, and an ardent gambler. And now he was fighting and gambling with the greatest adversary he had ever known. He got a certain grim enjoyment from this war, from his responsibility, and from his slow winning of authority.

For his authority was growing. The dullest-witted, the most antagonistic, could not help finally perceiving his sincerity. When he entered a house, the women no longer sprang at him. The patients, on their way to the hospital, forbore to curse him. Once, a distracted wife, following the stretcher, her cheeks scarred, like an Oriental mourner's, with long scratches from her fingers, cried out:

"Save my man, then, if you can!"

For they knew that he had saved some.

That evening, as the sun was setting in a great whorl of scarlet and amethystine fire, he walked out on the esplanade, looked up at the windows and the loggias, and shouted:

"People of Turrigianti, you've had a few days, now, of breaking the laws I set for you. All this time you've stood off from me; and you have paid the price. But the laws I made will still save the

rest of you. Once more you have the same choice—obedience and life, disobedience and death.”

As he departed, he left behind him silence instead of howls.

At the door of the church, he came on Don Vigilio, afoot again—an old wraith that tottered forward with the words:

“My son, my son, still walking and working! Do you not see that it’s God’s miracle?”

“Saint Giosuè’s camphor is ended,” replied Sebastian, absent-mindedly.

The priest’s face quivered. He stammered:

“How tired you must be!”

“Not so much as you’d think.”

“Will you sleep?”

Sebastian smiled.

“When you were tired, *Padre*, the Mass refreshed you. When I am tired, I also have my inspiration.”

He left the promontory, passed through the village, and ascended the western headland. The villa shone golden in the sunset.

Up there the air was pure; sweet flowers were blooming thick; a silence, as of a peace glimpsed only in dreams, enveloped everything. The heights, as if floating off amid a radiant mist toward heaven, seemed already to be bearing her away from him forever. He knew now the full value of those hours spent on the headland, when, for all her hatred, and for all his cruelty born of remorse, he had at least been near her. But even that time was ended now. And this separation was a foretaste of the eternal separation that was coming.



He turned away. Through the woods he climbed to the ruined temple on the northern ridge, entered the narrow door, and struck a match. The lizards scuttled into corners. But the voices of the Old Ones were hushed this evening. Silence enwrapped him, as he contemplated the faint, archaic inscription high on the wall behind the little altar.

*To reach my altar, that part of you which you have loved best must be destroyed.*

He went out. Lost in thought, he took the cliff-path eastward. He passed the platform where the *Camorristi* had attacked him. And he remembered Angiolo Cristofores.

Violence! Always violence and the threat of it! Old scenes rose up before him: dazzling snow-peaks with powder-smoke drifting over them; a green lawn at sunrise, and a young man stretched on it, dying from a sword-thrust: burning sands, and the rush of mounted Bedouins the tomb of whose Marabout he had profaned: a strip of lake-shore, the crack of duelling-pistols, a cluster of men in top-hats, another shape that would never stir again. . . . Violence! Always recoiling!

At the end of the path, on the ridge above the village, he looked toward the hermit's hut.

Some distance below it, on the rocky slope, two men were talking together. One was the new-comer to Torregiante. The other wore a long brown robe. The hermit.

Their discussion ended abruptly. The stranger

threw up his hand in a violent gesture such as accompanies an Italian's imprecation, and descended the hillside to the village. The hermit stood motionless, watching him. At last, his head bent, he began to walk slowly in Sebastian's direction. He entered the groves.

They met in the clearing where, in other days, Little Paganni had played flute-music to his goats.

Sebastian saw an emaciated young man, burnt almost black by the sun, with hair and beard brushing the wide collar of his faded gown. His lean waist was girt with cord. On his long, narrow feet were sandals. Through his hands slipped the big wooden beads of a coarse rosary. But when he felt the other's gaze, he stopped short, and raised his head. His features were attractive in their regularity, but marred by a dejection that approached stupidity.

Evidently his first impulse was to turn away. But with an obvious effort, he stood still, bowed, and examined the other with his melancholy eyes.

In this countenance, Sebastian discerned a certain resemblance to Angiolo Cristofores. The hermit was nearly handsome. The other was almost grotesquely ugly. Yet both showed traces of the same peculiar charm which, in this case, unhappiness, and, in the other, no doubt, association, had somewhat obscured. And Sebastian's interest, in seeing before him one more man whom the Innocenti had wrecked, was superseded by a larger curiosity, regarding these strange brothers.

What was their past—their birth and education? The forces that had made one a chief of the Camorra had turned the other, of the same flesh and blood, into a bead-telling devotee. Still, in the beginning, must they not have been very like?

And the conviction came to him that, in spite of all appearances, they were identical, even to-day—and that he was identical with both of them. In him, too, was the capacity for all their differing emotions and performances! And, for an instant, he seemed to see beyond the future and the past, to find himself a creature of infinite variety, to perceive himself, in retrospection and anticipation, moved by all the influences that had ever moved humanity. In that moment, for the first time in his life, he felt himself to be part of an immeasurable whole, which was forever struggling to be separate, and individual, yet never could accomplish separation.

That effort toward separation! It was that, perhaps, which caused all the anguish of humanity? . . . At least, had it not been the cause of all his anguish?

But this moment of perception, or imagination, ended as swiftly as it had begun. Nevertheless, he remained silent, amazed that such thoughts had come to him.

Finally, smiling, he asked the brown-clad man:

“And what do you think of it?”

“Of what, Signore,” the other returned, without surprise.

“Are we related also, you and I?”

The recluse regarded Sebastian thoughtfully, then responded:

"But why not? Since we have one Father."

The banality of this reply disappointed Sebastian. He had expected something more original, from so unusual a hermit. He tried again:

"But our performances—at least you won't find much family resemblance between them?"

"Between our performances, Signore? Why not? If they aren't alike at this moment, they have been, and they will be again. And at last they must be, for good and all. Since everything, in the end, must be identical."

This was slightly better.

"*Per Bacco!* Universal monotony, eh?"

"Why not say, universal harmony?"

A pause. At last, Sebastian, with a flicker of his old maliciousness, inquired:

"You haven't always had these ideas, I take it?"

"Perhaps only since I've been here." He added, simply: "I think God has told them to me, in the silence."

"Ah. It's in the silence that God speaks?"

"God speaks everywhere, at all times. But it's in the silence that one hears him."

"Has God told you also, by any chance, that your other relatives, the villagers down yonder, are dying right and left of cholera?"

"My brother has just told me that. I supposed that something had happened. They used to bring up food occasionally to my hut. Though that wasn't

necessary, as I had my little garden-patch. Still, they enjoyed doing it. But some days ago they stopped. However, my mind was otherwise engaged. I soon forgot to miss them."

Sabastian uttered a dry laugh.

"On my word, you take it coolly enough! It's not occurred to you, I presume, to wander down and lend a hand?"

The hermit met that smile with composure.

"It is the law of this world and the next, Signore, that every man must try to save himself." His lips contracted painfully. "And before dying of the cholera, or any other thing, I should like to feel that I had saved myself."

"But I should have thought that you, at least, were all settled on that score!"

The recluse turned his mournful eyes toward the lower slope, where Angiolo Cristofores had disappeared.

"Not yet, Signore."

And for an instant his face was the field of two intense desires in conflict, the old rising up against the new. . . . Sebastian, while descending to the village, still saw that look.

Where had he seen it before? In the face of Andreas Romanovitch? No, elsewhere also. . . . More recently. . . .

In a mirror! . . .

On the esplanade, he met the Syndic, and demanded:

"Anything fresh?"

"Eh! Certainly! Another house infected. One of the Paganni brats is down."

"Which?"

"The Little Paganni. My goatherd—*sanguinacciu!*"

Though Sebastian did not move, the Syndic called out sharply:

"Hold fast! Are you ill yourself, Signuri?"

He shook off the Syndic's hand. He started running toward a dilapidated hovel in the last alleyway, at the western extremity of the esplanade—Paganni's house.

And from the edge of the hilltop, Ghirlaine, looking down through the binoculars, saw him disappear into that alley.

She could guess at least the purport of the fat islander's message, and the reason for Sebastian's haste. A new case had developed. He had gone to the rescue.

And she wondered: "Is this the man I knew up there, in that other world?" But perhaps up there—and even here—she had not known him?

Twilight drew smoky veils across the hollows. The village roofs, changing slowly from rust-color to rose, floated in a void of vaporous black. On the eastern promontory, the bell-tower of the church soon looked like a charred shaft whose conflagration was dying gradually at its top. But the heights were still aflame! And now the contrast between the extinguished lowlands and the peaks was as moving as the difference between death and life.

The light faded from the sky. The shadows crept up the wooded slopes. Again they seemed to be reaching out for her. But this time they were striving to bring her not the infection of the village, but something else—a mysterious influence with which the lowlands had impregnated them?

All at once, she felt afraid. Danger was in those shadows! She drew back. She was on the point of fleeing to the house. But, as she turned, she was struck motionless. Close below her, amid the dusky foliage, stood a stranger.

Tall, dark-visaged, amazing in his foppish suit of flannels, he removed his hat with a flourish that made his rings flash in the expiring light. She heard a voice, well modulated, excessively polite, almost caressing in its amiability:

*“Per piacere, gentilissima Signora——”*

He stopped, regarded her face, then went on in French:

“May I beg you to tell me if Monsieur is at home?”

Her heart was pounding violently. It did not occur to her that this might be an emissary of Sangallo's. If he had been that, her intuition would not have filled her with such terror?

For everything about the stranger terrified her. The genial smile that she discerned on his dim face made her catch her breath. Even his fastidious attire sickened her with an unfathomable dread.

Where was Annibale? She remembered that Annibale had climbed down the northern cliffs to draw his nets.

Her voice uttered the words:

"His servant is close by, in the house, Monsieur, if you wish to send him a message."

The stranger smiled more amiably than before. She was sure that he knew not only of Sebastian's absence, but also of Annibale's.

"Another time, Madame."

His glance went past her, took in the villa, returned to fix itself on her face and figure. His smile became rather stiff. He did not move—but she had a shock as if he had laid his hands upon her.

"Another time, Madame. . . ."

His voice was slightly hoarse. And in his eyes appeared and disappeared a vivid gleam, of mingled menace and cupidity too strong to be concealed.

He bowed deeply, and was gone without a sound.

Annibale's words recurred to her: "More will come, Signura. They will send and send. . . ."

She found herself in the villa. In her bedchamber, she reached out of the window, to draw the shutters together. But she paused, to gaze down once more toward the village.

Suddenly she snatched up a scarf, wrapped it round her shoulders, and slipped from the house. On the edge of the hill, she wavered. Then with a distracted gesture she plunged down the path. The blackness of the woods engulfed her.

The path was rough. Roots and sharp stones bruised her feet through the thin soles of her slippers. Branches and brambles tore at the flimsy gown she wore, and whipped across her face. But now she was



running, oblivious to pain, with only the one thought: "I must be first!"

The trees thinned. The slope, strewn only by pale boulders now, stretched before her straight to the village. She sped onward. A red moon was rising. She saw the outlying hovels, strange in that unnatural radiance, all with blind windows, still as the dwellings of the dead.

She was on the esplanade. The darkness, the silence, the emptiness of that once busy place bewildered her. She strove to remember the alleyway into which Sebastian had disappeared. But the alleyways all seemed alike. And from each of them issued the same pestilential odors.

"And it's been in such a place. . . ."

Two men were approaching through the shadows, walking with measured steps, carrying between them something on a stretcher. Behind them stumbled another, two mattocks over his shoulder.

With a gasp, she shrank back against a wall. But, as the third passed her, she swayed forward, and caught him by the sleeve.

"The Signuri— Where is the Signuri——"

The man started violently. His mattocks clattered on the stones. He jumped back, and crossed himself.

Then the lantern of a street-shrine revealed to him that this wild-eyed being, in her slim whiteness, with the glittering veil and flowing golden hair, was not the Angel of Death. His face darkened with shame. He snatched up the mattocks. In harsh tones:

"*Eccu!*"

He pointed behind her.

"Paganni's house. The second door."

She entered the alley.

Stifling, noisome, the very air of it seemed to her impregnated with mortality. "I shall die of this," she told herself. "I am going toward death!" In the gloom, the two men and their burden still hovered before her eyes, an appalling vision. She had a feeling that they had not gone on—that they were waiting, at the mouth of this pit, for her also.

She laid her hand upon the door-latch. But there was still time to go back. . . .

The door, as if of its own accord, swung open. A stream of candle-light gushed out, enveloped her, and drew her forward.

She saw a room of indescribable squalor. In a corner, savage, grief-stricken faces. A wrecked bedstead, and on the pillow a little thin face with fixed eyes and open mouth. By the bed, Sebastian. The expression he wore bewildered her. Was it really he?

He looked up and saw her. Staring, perfectly pallid, he rose slowly to his feet.

"You!"

Leaning against the door:

"The *Camorristi* again. . . . Another. . . ."

But everything was swimming in a mist.

## CHAPTER XXII

Ghirlaine found herself sitting on a broken stool beside the door. Before her stood Sebastian, his figure half blotting out the squalid little room—the bed on which the sick child lay motionless, the corners encumbered with fishing-nets and oars, the inner doorway, framing the uncouth, startled faces of the Paganni family. His bulk seemed to be trying to conceal that scene from her.

"You must get out of here. Everything in this place is dangerous. As for me——"

A caricature of his old sardonic smile appeared.

"As for me, I've never been a more impossible associate than I am at present."

She did not move. He went on, still calm externally, but with a sort of smothered exasperation:

"What are you here for? On the hill you were safe—you might have been a thousand miles away from any cholera. You must be mad!"

She returned weakly:

"A man came to the villa. A stranger."

Sebastian made an angry gesture.

"I know. The new *Camorrista*. But he's after me, not you."

She remembered vividly that visitor's last look. She knew that whatever might have been his first

intentions, now, since he had seen her, he was after her as well. But was it that which had brought her down into the cholera? Sebastian's retort was like a blow to her.

She asked herself, "What am I here for, indeed!" She was ready to sink into the ground with shame. But with an effort she looked him steadily in the face. And, finally, that he should never dream the truth, she uttered:

"There was something about him that terrified me. I felt myself in danger. And Annibale was down the cliffs. . . ."

He gave her a long stare. His cheeks grew darker, his eyeballs were suffused with blood.

"So, that's it, eh?"

He glanced out toward the alley. He made a movement, perhaps involuntary, as if to leave the house. But he recovered himself, and turned quickly to the bed.

There had reached him from the bed a strange, thin gasp.

Under the ragged coverlid, the child's chest was heaving. The little mouth was wider open, reaching for more air. A fresh paroxysm was beginning.

In Sicilian, to the watchers in the doorway:

"Hot blankets! Move sharp! You, Paganni, lend a hand here. Pass me that bottle."

The mother, a woman of forty, already heavily wrinkled, her coarse black hair streaming down about her haggard cheeks, disappeared with a sharp cry into the adjoining room. The father, his long, Ara-

bian features alive for once, sprang to the bedside. In the doorway, little Giacinta, clinging to the jamb, began to wail afresh, while, in the other room, to a tremendous clatter of pots, a baby set up its howl.

Sebastian ejaculated:

"Body of God, Paganni, are those children still here? Two hours ago I told you to take them to the Syndic. You might as well cut their throats and have done!"

Big Paganni raised his head. His features stiffened. His eyes showed the dumb resignation of a beast.

"What difference? In this house we're all as good as dead, already."

The mother appeared in the doorway with steaming blankets. Sebastian snatched them from her arms.

The coverlid was whipped back. One saw for an instant the small, blotched body, rigid, but shaken by tremors. Then, swiftly, with the deftness of much practice, Sebastian swathed the little shape from chin to feet in the hot bedclothes. Only the face remained uncovered—the pitiable childish face, with temples sunken, with nose so sharpened as to give an uncanny impression of maturity, with eyes quite motionless, oblivious to all about them.

But Sebastian, his hands working rapidly, was muttering to himself:

"This devilish fixity of the pupils! But no complete coma, yet, at least."

He fumbled amid the blankets, felt the boy's feet

and hands, touched the tongue, emptied a spoonful of lemon-water into the open mouth.

"However, if this reaction is irregular, too. . . ."

His fingers on Little Paganni's pulse, he looked up absent-mindedly. His eyes encountered Ghirlaine's. And she realized that she had been forgotten.

Across the bed, in the hush of that perilous and wretched room, there took place a swift crossing of looks and words—a duel perhaps more pregnant than all the rest:

"Why are you still here?"

"Because I'm afraid to go."

"You had courage enough to come."

"Perhaps. But not to go back. . . ."

"Do you understand the danger you're running here?"

"I think so. I prefer it to the other. . . ."

"You mean the *Camorrista*?"

"Of course. . . ."

She smiled, as grown persons smile at children who have no means of grasping certain thoughts.

He said:

"As soon as I can, I'll get a trustworthy man to take you home."

She rose to her feet. White-clad, the shining scarf falling from her shoulders, her hair flashing in the candle-light, she seemed like a supernatural visitor to this hovel of despair. With a slow, resolute movement of her pure body, she advanced, and stood beside the cholera-bed.

Looking down at the small face between them on

the pillow, she put out her hand—the most exquisite hand that he had ever seen—and laid it softly on Little Paganni's brow.

"You must tell me what to do. I am so ignorant of suffering, and its relief."

She stared round her at the room.

"Indeed, of everything. . . ."

The slightest flush stained her throat. She concluded:

"But now I shall begin to learn."

Once again, with set jaws, he began to count the patient's pulse. When he had finished, harshly:

"I shall want more hot blankets at once. Agata, take the Signura with you. She is going to help us make your little fellow well again."

The mother peered up into Ghirlaine's face. Her eyes shone with hope. She whispered:

"Ai! If it is not the Madonna, then the Madonna has sent her!"

And backing before that shining stranger, as if before a vision, she led the way into the other room. Sebastian turned again to Little Paganni. And the struggle recommenced.

Through it all she moved like one in a dream, though quick to grasp the meaning of his orders, and to fulfil them. She gazed on the working of the vast, apparently malignant force that strove against them—on its progress, its momentary bafflement, its terrible persistence. Such physical ravagement she had never before imagined. This frail little creature, so helpless, seemed given over, in his every fibre, as a

prey to death. And his defence, despite its ardor, how primitive, how inadequate in its instruments! She would have been utterly hopeless, but for Sebastian's face—the face of a man who will not own defeat.

But to-night Sebastian was not fighting for the mere sake of winning. He was fighting for the life of a child whose beauty and naturalness had touched his heart, who had been the first to wake in him the instinct of self-perpetuation.

So he fought as he had not fought before in Torregiante. And at last, soon after midnight, there entered into that combat the first vague premonition of victory.

Little Paganni's skin grew moist. His eyes lost something of their immobility. His paroxysms became less intense. His feet and hands ceased to feel ice-cold. Even his pulse-beat was more nearly regular.

"This time, a good reaction!"

Agata, the mother, knelt and prayed. Her large, coarse lips moved tremulously. Her gaze was fixed with frightful fervor on the shelf, high against the wall, that held the inevitable battered image of the Virgin. Big Paganni, seated on the floor, let his head sink forward toward his ragged knees. Even his battered hands, pendent and quivering, looked exhausted. He was like a foundered animal.

In the other room, the children were asleep.

Ghirlaine contemplated the setting of this drama. No place could well have been more wretched or



begrimed. Every article in the room, and on the backs of its habitual occupants, was a wreck. The makeshifts of this household were infinitely pathetic to her. She had never imagined such poverty. It seemed incredible that human beings should be reduced to live so, and yet so ardently desire to cling to life, and to preserve their offspring to it.

She examined the faces and attitudes of the parents. Those hardly seemed to her the features, and the poses, of real people. There was a degree of physical abasement below which her full comprehension could not plunge.

But she felt that such existences somehow brought home an immeasurable shame to her. Or, at least, to the class of which she was a part?

For these poor creatures ever to rise above themselves would require centuries on centuries of evolution. But if those above them helped them?

Her gaze returned to Sebastian. She considered his efforts of this night, of all the nights and days since the cholera had come to Torregiante. She recalled him as she had known him up there, in France, in Rome, and as she had previously known of him—a notorious figure infinitely worse than useless, an intellect devoted to destruction and perversity. Sangallo's words returned to her, "If only that dead soul of his were resurrected!"

Had that miracle not at least begun?

If it should continue? With that extraordinary force and keenness preserved from self-destruction, and turned toward different ends, what might he not

do, in this world where so little, after all, had yet been done?

She forgot the child before her, her own peril, and stricken Torregiante. Her thoughts reached forward, through the present darkness, toward the future, as though toward a unique and splendid dawn. . . .

The latch clicked. In the light of the guttering candles, a young man's stolid face appeared. He touched his hat, with a slouchy imitation of a military salute.

"Excellency, you're wanted at the parish-house."

Sebastian rose, examined Little Paganni, and turned to Ghirlaine.

"Will you let this man take you to the villa now?"

"Who would watch the child, then, while you're away?"

He regarded her for a time, then said, impassively:

"If the spasms return, you know by this time what to do. When he seems to need nourishment, give him some white of egg beaten up with water. The chicken-coop is under the bed."

He hesitated, and added:

"I needn't remind you again of the danger. . . ."

She heard his foot-falls in the alleyway, diminishing slowly.

Beneath the red moon, Sebastian walked along the esplanade toward the parish-house. Beside him went the messenger, knocking his wooden-soled shoes against the mooring-rings.

The windows and the loggias were dark. The fishing-boats, drawn up on the strand, seemed like the abandoned fleet of men who would never return. In the silence, the noise of the four shoe-soles re-echoed from the dim house-walls. The messenger commenced to discuss the last man he had helped to bury. That had been the post-master.

"Eh, Signuri, but Annibale will laugh! It was the post-master, you know, who wanted to marry Fannia."

Sebastian returned, wearily:

"A creature like Fannia would have made two wives for that little fellow."

"He was a short specimen, for a fact. He saved us the weight of several spadefuls—may his feet be cool in Purgatory. . . . Have you noticed the moon to-night, Excellency? It looks as if it had been dipped in blood. That means a *fattu di sangui*—a murder."

"We're having rather enough mortality, I think, as it is."

"*Pri Baccu!* Wait till the doctors come! They'll show us what dead men look like, will the doctors!"

But Sebastian's thoughts had returned to the room he had just left, and her face, as he had seen it at their parting.

They passed the Grand Café of the Sea. In the dark doorway, a man was lounging. He flicked the ashes from a cigarette: and the red light in the sky sent flashes from his finger-rings.

Sebastian halted. For an instant, he nearly lost

his self-control. He had an inclination to draw the pistol from his pocket and empty it into the body of the *Camorrista*. But he remembered the night of Saint Giosuè's *festa*, the storm, her room, a long knife pressed against that perfect breast. . . . A low laugh, of self-contempt, escaped him. Should one kill another for impulses identical with one's own?

"Good-evening, Signore," said Sebastian.

The stranger instantly made a wide flourish with his panama hat.

"Good-evening to you, Signore! Not too gay, these days, Torregiante, eh?"

"No, not too gay."

"I presume you're rather busy just now?"

"Somewhat."

The stranger was silent for a time. Then, suavely:

"Well, Signore, good-night, and take good care of yourself."

"Good-night, Signore. Good repose."

The eastern promontory grew distinct before them. The church-tower, bathed in the unnatural radiance of the night, rose behind the parish-house softly alight at every window. On the threshold Don Vigilio met him.

"Well, my son, it's still another hopeless case."

"Old Ilario?"

"No, he is better. The school-master."

Sebastian entered. The familiar atmosphere, of concentrated suffering and terror, enveloped him.

He passed through the kitchen. There Maria was sprawled over a chair asleep, her triple chin sagging,

her hands, white and corrugated from the handling of countless steaming blankets, half open on her knees. "Poor old rip," said Sebastian to himself, and stepped more lightly. But, with a snort, Maria scrambled to her feet. She rumbled:

"Signuri, the barley gruel and the milk are ready. I've boiled five litres of tea. But we need more red wine. . . ."

Rubbing her eyes, she waddled after him into the adjoining room.

There the pallets lay close. The faces upturned to the faint light were all strangely similar in their color and their sharpness. At his approach, some eyes remained motionless, oblivious, as if fixed on mysteries that these others could not yet see. But a few, slowly rolling their bluish visages toward him, seemed, so to speak, to return a little way from the border-land of life.

He went from one to another, touching the skin, laying a finger on a pulse, saying a word or two, smiling a smile that these men, even in their extremity, could appreciate—a smile that told them, "At least we're still fighting!" He turned to the priest.

"How are the women?"

"Most of them are better than these."

"Then let's look at the school-master."

But it needed only a glance at the school-master to tell Sebastian the worst.

"We can do nothing here. He'll go out in this reaction."

Once more, Don Vigilio's faded eyes were called

upon to fill with tears. All this poor victim's past chirrupings of blasphemy, all his covert sneers, all his spiteful little acts of enmity and obstruction, were quite forgotten now. The old priest turned to Maria.

"Hang some sheets round this cot. I am going for the *Santissimo*."

"The *Santissimo* for an atheist?" asked Sebastian, dryly.

"Are we so sure, after all?"

Sebastian sat down beside the bed.

The school-master became conscious of his presence. His head turned on the pillow. He sent forth a long look, of poignant inquiry.

Sebastian nodded.

He had received that mute inquiry before, from other eyes. He had answered it before in the same manner, to prepare the questioner for the sight of Don Vigilio in his vestments, with the Host gleaming in his hands. But his answer had never produced, in the wretch who comprehended it, this look of absolute despair. For in the others there had been the certainty of something in the Beyond. In this one, there was nothing but the prospect of annihilation.

Annihilation! To become nothing! To cease utterly to be! To the poor vain egotist it was more ghastly than the expectation of a Hell!

Intent, still almost dispassionately curious, Sebastian watched the play of emotion on that puerile countenance. "Truly," he muttered, below his breath, "it takes strong men to stand alone. But

how should one know how strong he is, until the final test? . . ."

Presently, from the lips of the sufferer, broke a voiceless cry:

"No! . . . No! . . ."

Sebastian asked calmly:

"And why not?"

"The darkness. . . . If only . . . But the darkness! . . ."

Then he saw the priest at the bedside, robed, holding the Viaticum, and behind him, in a dirty, tattered surplice, the little acolyte, shrinking from all that met his eyes.

And, without stirring, suddenly the victim's whole body appeared to reach out toward that emblem of Immortality, that seemed of itself to give forth a singular radiance from between Don Vigilio's transparent fingers.

The priest's countenance showed a smile at once triumphant and pitiful. He sank on one knee beside the pallet. His arm was solemnly extended. Docilely, the anguished eyes veiled themselves. With his thumb, Don Vigilio anointed them. The hush was penetrated by his quavering whisper:

"Through this holy unction, and His most tender mercy, may God pardon thee those sins thou hast committed by seeing. Amen. . . ."

He touched the ears, and then the lips.

"Through this holy unction, and His most tender mercy, may God pardon thee those sins thou hast committed by speaking. Amen. . . ."

"Through this holy unction . . . ."

The words, very softly spoken, seemed different from other words. Each syllable had, as it were, an unearthly value. At least, the effect was extraordinary. The face on the pillow ceased to be the face of one in torment.

In the end, delicately, between thumb and finger, Don Vigilio held out the crucifix. And the disfigured lips, through which had passed abnegation and blasphemy of God, kissed with a thirsty eagerness the rudely chiselled little image of Christ. When all was finished, his visage was as calm as the others had been. . . .

Sebastian returned to the Pagannis' house.

The air had freshened. Dawn was near. From the groves on the slopes behind the village came the twitter of waking birds. One call was like the liquid cadenza of a flute of donax-reeds. He quickened his steps.

The alley-door stood open. Ghirlaine was sitting at the bedside. Her eyes were hollow: but her face wore a look of happiness!

He stood beside her.

"How has he been?"

"So much better!"

Sebastian leaned over Little Paganni. Very gently he brushed back the thick chestnut curls. His hand lingered on the young cheeks. He uttered a low laugh.

"By Jove, I think we've won!"

He turned to the mother and the father.



"My friends, I fancy your *maffiusinu* is going to get well. *Pipa!* No noise! He must sleep. And, by the same token, so must I!"

He shook off the woman, who was trying to kiss his hand.

"Pay attention to what I'm saying, both of you. I've given orders for him to be removed at daylight to the parish-house, and for the other children to go to the Syndic. As soon as they're out, this bed, and everything we've been using, will be destroyed. Whatever is destroyed, as I've told you all, time and time again, I will replace. So perhaps you won't take clubs to my young men, when they come to burn mattresses?"

"As for you two, eat and drink nothing, henceforth, that hasn't been prepared in the café. Touch no food without washing your hands in hot water. If one of you feels ill, let the other come and hunt me up."

To Ghirlaine:

"Now, then, I'll see you to the villa."

They emerged into the alleyway, gray with the first light of the dawn. Big Paganni and Agata followed them. The mother kept crying:

"God will reward you! God and His blessed saints will reward you!"

The father, his long face twisted into unaccustomed lines of gratitude, echoed her with violent fervor:

"God will surely reward you! . . ."

Sebastian and Ghirlaine traversed the esplanade,

climbed amid the boulders of the lower slope, and took the hill-path toward the headland.

On the ascent, a cool breeze came to them out of the pale east.

"The heat is breaking. That's what we need. Perhaps this is the turning-point."

"Perhaps. . . ."

As they climbed through the woods, the sky, beyond the swaying branches, turned from green to gold. The heavens were pervaded by an intense clarity.

Amid the leaves, on all sides, the birds were warbling, joyously, at the new gift of life that had just come to them, with the immaculate dawn.

Ahead, the trees thinned away. On the summit appeared the villa, ruddy in the first dazzling shafts of sunlight, transfigured, like a place of dreams.

Sebastian halted.

"I'll leave you here."

"And where are you going now?"

"To the church. I've a cot under Don Vigilio's pulpit. And I'll warrant I'm not the first who's slept in that vicinity!"

He turned grave.

"Those clothes you have on. Throw them over the cliffs before you bathe."

He still hesitated, staring into her eyes. Then:

"Tell me truly. Was it altogether the *Camorrista*?"

"Altogether."

"Your fear of him, I mean?"

Her eyes fell.

"My fear of him. Of what might happen. . . ."

"Not your determination, then, to show once more that you were not a coward?"

She raised her head. Speaking quickly, in a breathless way:

"I came down to warn you. I thought you didn't know. I believed you were in danger."

His features did not change. But a white flame seemed to have swept across his face.

"And?"

"And those poor creatures down there had no one who could help them but you. . . . If anything had happened to you, what would have happened to them? . . ."

"Ah."

He turned away, and went down the hillside.

She stood looking after him, her hands pressed against her heart, a figure all aflame in the red sunrise.

## CHAPTER XXIII

GHIRLAINE, despite her physical weariness, did not sleep. Her mind had never been more feverishly active. And from none of her thoughts did she draw back to-day, not even from the most enormous—that this man, who had done her irreparable injuries, might on two occasions, by a word or gesture, have made her forget all that!

The night when he had turned back the cholera mob, this morning, when he had left her to go down again into the plague-town, there had welled up in her heart an unreasoning, fierce homage. At those moments, she had seen nothing distinctly save his unconquerable virility. And to that perception her nature had responded with such fervor as if in her body a strange being had replaced herself.

“Who am I?” she thought. “What is he? What are we all, in this mad world where only the impossible seems to happen?” She looked in her mirror, at the face that had brought these things to pass. Contemplating that beauty, she remembered Helen’s, which had been the death of countless brave men, and the ruin of a city. She remembered Lucretia, and the wars that had followed on her tears. And she realized that age after age certain visages must be the instruments of tragedy.

Now she discerned many things that had been

veiled from her, in the old life up there. Even his emotions, as they had been related to her, she could glimpse now. But not yet in their entirety.

And there came to her an intense curiosity, such as she had not felt regarding even Vincent Pamfort.

In Vincent Pamfort, for all his native reticence, there was nothing complex. Her years with him would have been practically a continuation of the old. Was it not as a safe life-comrade, rather than as a lover, that he had appealed to her? Had they ever really risen above sentimental mediocrity?

She recalled the night of his good-by in the Palazzo Campobasso. But was it surely he who had impelled that moment of unprecedented self-abandonment? . . .

Did she not remember it! And their mutual amazement—hers at herself, and his at what she had revealed! Then, for an instant, she had known herself to be a creature of possibilities hitherto unguessed—the sanctuary of divine fires. And had he not, just for one second, recoiled from that perception, almost like a man who has embraced a human shape, to find her suddenly transformed into an immortal? . . .

If he had evoked that moment, would he have met it so? Could one who had drawn back from it, for however infinitesimal a time, ever have risen with her into those radiant, flaming spaces that had then opened out above her?

A half-pitying smile crossed her lips. She looked back on the past as one looks back from maturity on

adolescence, when smaller needs were satisfied with smaller things. The dream of the peaceful English country-side receded even farther, and grew very dim—like a mirage that could no longer hover near this isle of savage hues and violent contours.

But surely that less vital past was soon going to reclaim her now. What was phantasmal to-day would coalesce into reality again. And this place would become the dream.

She felt a swift flash of rage, that forces and persons, instead of herself, should so sweep her hither and thither. Why did she exist, if she had no choice to choose?

But what did she wish to choose?

Unflinchingly, she looked this question in the face: "Would I want everything just as it was before?"

The past years rose up, their fashionable richness, their aimless hubbub, the feverish fulness of events that masked their emptiness—how trivial, how meretricious, how humdrum now! As a girl, she had stood on the threshold of those ample, glistening places filled with an ecstasy of anticipation, her eyes dazzled by the brilliancy, her senses confused by the clatter of meaningless festivity, sure that the culmination of all happiness lay within. But how soon had she not begun to repeat those words, "It is only elsewhere that I shall find it!"

Then Pamfort had come, and she had seen another sort of vista, serene, tender, placid as the "golden mean" of Horace. That region she would never reach. But would she have gone back to the point where its attainment had been possible?

Now she repeated again:

"It is only elsewhere. . . ."

For her awakening spirit saw that vista, too, as a space too small for her containment.

"What am I, to-day? What shall I be to-morrow? . . ."

At last, wearied by such speculations, she went out on the portico, and gazed down, hands shading eyes, skirts blowing, toward the village.

The air was clear. Every house-window, every roof, every brown-tile gutter, stood forth distinctly. The fishing-boats, drawn up on the beach, sent to her the various colors of their painted hulls. This atmospheric clarity elated her. The clean, fresh wind had swept away the heat-mists. Perhaps it would sweep away the cholera?

Fannia came, the baby in her arms, her ragged skirts flapping round her stout brown ankles, and stood beside Ghirlaine. The latter asked:

"Where is Annibale?"

"On the hillside, Signura, since you told him of this new *Camorrista*. To make sure that one doesn't come up a third time."

"Then he came up a second time!"

"Part-way." Fannia's strong, handsome face was twisted by a half-contemptuous grimace. "Part-way only, Signura. For Annibale clicked his rifle behind the cactus, and called out: 'This is private land, foreigner. Nothing passes here but bullets.'"

"And the *Camorrista*?"

"What was there for him to do? He laughed out of one side of his mouth, and went down again."

She reflected awhile, then added, with a sort of grudging admiration:

"But the Signuri, when *he* first came up, and Annibale clicked his rifle at him, didn't go back."

And after a time:

"But what would you have? The Signuri isn't like other men. As you are not like other women, Signura."

"Am I not, Fannia?"

They gazed into each other's eyes: and Ghirlaine's fell before the peasant's, which were full of a strangely piercing, natural intelligence.

"Eh," said Fannia, dryly, turning away, "I think not, for a fact, Signura. . . . *Eccu!* Look, there is the Signuri now, going to the parish-house."

They saw him cross the esplanade, and climb the eastern promontory. Don Vigilio met him at the door, and they went in together.

Within, they found improvement. At every cot, their spirits rose higher. It seemed as if the cholera, like a sentient thing, had almost satisfied its lust for killing. The dangerous cases were convalescent. No new seizures were reported from the village. Indoors and out, a current of fresh vitality, and of hope, had as it were been set in motion by that quickened air. In the hospital, eyes showed instead of the blankness of despair the eagerness of sufferers who see a fighting chance.

Sebastian moved among them, haggard, but beaming. The very weak followed him continually with beseeching glances. The convalescents returned his



greetings with faint grins, half ashamed and half exultant. Old Ilario, on his pallet, stretched out his dry, withered neck, showed under his white bristles a curious contortion of the mouth, and revealed the fact that even he could produce a sort of smile.

"Well, grandfather! The wind has changed."

"I knew it."

"And now we're all going to get well."

"I don't dispute it. Even this old hulk, I think."

"And when you're on your feet again?" asked Sebastian, looking at him keenly.

The ancient's puckered face twitched. Presently he whispered:

"Well, Signuri, it's like this. While I lay here, waiting for Don Vigilio to feed me the Sacrament and have done with me, I found time to think a bit. I thought some of Fannia, my trollop of a daughter. And of Annibale. And of that brat of theirs. . . . What did you say his name was?"

"Ercole."

"Ercole, that's it. A silly name: but any business left to two fools is a silly business. Anyhow, I thought of him, for some reason or other. And of a drum I have in my house, that I bought one day, like a donkey, for eighteen soldi, when I was in Trapani, many years ago. When I thought my wife was going to have a boy. But all she had, *porca Madonna*, was Fannia!"

"What an outrage!"

"Eh! Who can depend on a woman to do a good piece of work! . . . So I thought of that drum, like

an old donkey, as I say. When I should have been thinking of the Sacrament. Though," with a side-glance to see if Don Vigilio was near, "I dare say the taste of it is quite a disappointment to most of us?"

"You mustn't talk too much just yet, Ilario."

"Signuri, it is a fact that these last few days a number of my organs have gone against my wishes, but at least I am the master of my tongue. To resume. That drum. It's broken in on one side, and my wife got a beating for that. But now she's dead these several years, and doubtless understands why. . . . Anyhow, not to take in all the fish one by one, when I'm on my legs again, I shall fetch that drum up to your place, and give it to this brat by the name of Ercole, and say to him, 'Now, then, beat it well, and let me hear you beat it well, and an apoplexy on you for making me climb this hill for such a trifle!'"

The old man, with a snort, turned his head away and lay motionless. He concluded, harshly:

"You asked me what I shall do when I'm up, and I've told you. Well, are you satisfied?"

"Oh, quite!"

"Then in God's name, leave me for a while in peace!"

Sebastian moved on to the *Maresciallo's* bedside.

The big, blond carabineer was well enough, by this time, to be angry at Sicily's delay in sending help. But when he had relieved his mind with a volley of Tuscan expletives, he stopped, shrugged his shoulders, and remarked:

"After all, Excellency, these southerners. As these islanders of Torregiante are to Sicily, so is Sicily to the North. What haven't I learned, since my profession brought me into these parts! For one thing, that it's folly to expect much of folks who've never had the means of learning. That is why I'm not so full as I used to be of virtuous indignation, when one of them, for instance, commits a *fatto di sangue*, and throws his victim down the trap in the temple of the Old Ones. . . ."

Sebastian returned his steady gaze unwinkingly, till he went on:

"For of course, from their point of view, there are always extenuating circumstances. Which, even from ours, must be rather sound, when a gentleman is accessory to the deed?"

Still Sebastian made no reply. The Marshal mused:

"To make a murder trial, the body is indispensable. I think no one will ever get at Nino's. The Old Ones are jealous of their secrets. Besides, perhaps all this is just a surmise of mine. . . . In my opinion, that disappearance must join the unexplained mysteries of Torregiante."

Said Sebastian at last:

"*Maresciallo*, I believe you possess that rare thing, a sympathetically judicial mind."

"Too much honor, Excellency! But at least, I've learned this much in these parts: that the law isn't justice when applied in the same way to the civilized and the uncivilized. *Mah*, does one punish children

as one punishes men? And if these people remain like children, their crimes, as well as their sufferings, are on our head. We who are rising, Signore, owe it to the rest to pull them after us?"

"These are not the ideas of a carabineer, *Maresciallo*."

"Maybe your Excellency is right. Some of them are probably Don Vigilio's, and I have had them from him in our evenings together? At any rate, it's perfectly true that I've only had them lately."

"A place for new thoughts, eh, Torregiante? . . ."

And Sebastian returned absent-mindedly to Little Paganni's cot.

Old Maria was sitting beside that small patient, her triple chin sagging, fighting against drowsiness. But at Sebastian's approach she straightened her mountainous body with a grunt. Eagerly, in a violent wheeze, which doubtless she believed to be a whisper:

"He is asleep."

"He is lucky."

"An hour ago he drank broth, and asked after his relations like a man. If I had had a son, he would have been like this one! But alas, my sons were all daughters, and the four of them died in one week in the year of the small-pox. A poor thing, my husband, for a fact, blessed soul. . . . He was drowned in a storm, and there went down with him a boat-load of fine fish—as you see, an extravagant fellow to the last! But handsome when he was young. This little one looks like him, as he was in his boyhood.

We were betrothed at ten years of age. At sixteen we married, and none too soon. Will you believe that in those days there were plenty to whisper in old Maria's ear? . . . Eh, and here is another that we've saved to turn girls' heads, and play once too often with danger, whether of water or steel, and leave a fool of a woman crying in a half-empty bed! . . ."

Said Sebastian, looking down at the little thin face on the pillow:

"If I had my own future in my hands, I could tell you very quickly what we've saved him for. . . ."

That afternoon, he walked with Don Vigilio, on the stone terrace before the church-door.

They talked of the checking of the cholera, and pondered the question whether their rude efforts, or some freak of the epidemic, had been responsible. Finally, the priest declared:

"This is my belief. In every time, men live in the age of miracles. That they don't realize the fact, is because they themselves are the instruments of the miraculous. Men are moved to do wonders, and, the wonders done, say, 'It is I who have accomplished this.' But at our moment of highest inspiration, whether in science, or art, or social usefulness, when that is suddenly born in us which makes for a new power in the human battle, whence comes the germ for that birth? Ah, my son, believe me, we are just the field—how fallow, if we but cleared the ground of weeds! And the seed floats down, alights within us, takes root, springs up, and bears the miraculous fruit. . . .

"One day you asked me the story of Saint Giosuè. It is all written out in an ancient book in the sacristy, in old French, from the days of Roger the Norman. How a soldier of fortune, who had seen much blood and cruelty in many lands, came here in pursuit of a great lady, who had fled from him. Here he ran her down, for she had taken refuge in a castle which used to stand where we're standing now, but centuries ago its walls all crumbled into the sea. And here they fought, as he tells it, the 'battle of the white banner and the red.'

"And he says: 'Of all the wars and feuds I had known—and those were not a few—never before had I found the field so ill prepared for victory. For this was the Isle of Life, and the voices of the Old Ones troubled me. And out of the very soil of the Isle of Life, there rose strange whispers from the past, and the shapes of old crimes. Till at last, one evening, walking on the heights, as always in the intervals of my besiegement, I saw our Blessed Lord and Saviour coming toward me through the shadows, leading by the hand the image of Myself, all black and bloody, to show it to me. And I fled from that sight, and went down to the shore. And there I took off my hauberk and my helmet, and knelt before the castle gate, and cried out, "King Roger has said yes, but King Jesus Christ says no. Go in peace." And she departed, standing like a fair white image against the sky, on a little galley; for I had sent back the large ships for engines to break the walls. And at her departure she appeared so beautiful that she

seemed already to have become a soul in Paradise. And this was no less strange than all the rest: for the galley went down in a great sea off Sicily—but she was lifted up, with robes all dry, by angels into Paradise, as those testified who were saved. And I sent away my people, bidding them go their ways and do no more evil. But I remained here. And when King Roger sent messengers, I gave them for him my broken sword, and a cross that I had carved out of olive-wood. And since then, every evening on the heights, I meet my Saviour walking hand in hand with Myself; but Myself is no longer black and bloody. For—and these words are engrossed in gold—‘that part of me which I loved best I have destroyed.’”

Sebastian started from his revery.

“The writing in the temple!”

“Is that so? Well, what is new, in this life?”

“What indeed? . . .”

For a while, Sebastian smoked in silence. At length, with a smile:

“Are you familiar, *Padre*, with the doctrine of reincarnation?”

“Somewhat.”

“But naturally it hasn’t your approval. Nor mine, as I need hardly say! . . . All the same, it’s an amusing theme for fancy, for egotists, who dream of getting in a hereafter what Fate has denied them here. . . . Our Giosuè, first *condottiere* at large, then local saint—one would imagine, according to the Buddhists, for instance, that he’d finished that par-

ticular test successfully, and wouldn't have to return to it again?"

"I presume one would think so, yes, according to the Buddhists," Don Vigilio answered, in some perplexity.

"Unless," Sebastian resumed, still smiling, "his final decision was an error?"

"An error!"

As if to himself, Sebastian repeated:

"Not union, but separation. . . ."

The old priest's worn face began to flush.

"Not carnal union, no. But not separation, either! Union with God, my son."

"Are the two absolutely incompatible?"

Don Vigilio quoted, in a quivering voice:

"He who declares that celibacy is not a better state, let him be anathema!"

"Then why are we here, in this world?"

"To triumph over it."

"Why should I have half-expected you to say, To fit ourselves to live in it? . . . No, we must differ there. In my opinion, Saint Giosuè read the writing wrong."

His gaze reached out toward the western headland. High into the clear sky it rose; and round its vast rock foundations, on the bosom of the sharp blue sea, came creeping a strange steam-boat.

Sebastian added quietly:

"And for Saint Giosuè, at least, there must still have been time to read it right. . . . Look, *Padre*. There comes a ship. I fancy it's one that I've been expecting for a long while."



"The doctors!"

"You think so?"

"But what else, good Heavens!"

"At any rate, let's go down and see."

But it was only the doctors.

White-clad, with orderlies, nurses, and a detachment of carabinieri from Palermo, they swarmed into Torregiante, to find their work all done for them. The epidemic was conquered. The islanders were peaceable once more. Nothing remained but to disinfect the houses and the alleyways, safeguard the convalescents—and irritate the natives.

For these, at the invasion of the "foreigners," had shown signs of new suspicion. Where there were doctors were always dead men! Did these strutting strangers intend to undo everything?

It was not till Sebastian had harangued them on the esplanade, that they would leave off showing their teeth and growling. Then Big Paganni, standing lank and solemn in his patches, his slanting eyes fixed on Sebastian, voiced the general sentiment:

"Signuri, if you tell us it's so, we will believe you—till we see otherwise for ourselves. You have given me back my son; and there are more here present who owe some life to you. We people of Turrianti aren't fond of strangers at any time. As perhaps you've found out for yourself. These new ones are assassins at home, no doubt, one and all! You see them over everything already, like a litre of fleas! Let them take care that nobody sickens of their biting! . . .

"But you say you'll be responsible? Only one

thing, Signuri. We ask you to see that they finish their foolishness and go quickly. We are free men here, not used to taking orders from outsiders, and our tempers are short. A man can't contain himself forever. Better to let some one else's blood than to let one's own in an apoplexy. . . ."

Toward evening, Sebastian, freed from his labors, went up to the northern cliffs, and entered the temple.

He took from his pocket a candle-end, lighted it, and set it on the little altar. Then, leaning forward, he deciphered once more the archaic inscription on the wall.

*To reach my altar, that part of you which you have loved best must be destroyed. . . .*

Up from the echo-well, through the subterranean passages somewhere in which the bones of uncounted dead men lay, clear from the caves, far below, where the languid tide was rolling in, came softly the "voices of the Old Ones," murmuring still, as it seemed, the cryptic answer to that enigma. The dim stone sanctuary was full of that mysterious sibilance, persistent through the ages.

At last Sebastian sighed quickly, then uttered a low laugh.

Reaching for the candle-end, he turned toward the door. His hand remained extended. He stood motionless. He felt himself growing tense, compact, more powerful and more intelligent than he had been a moment before. A thrill of primitive joy went through him.

A dozen feet away, before the stone screen that masked the entrance, on the very crack of the secret pitfall, a tall man was standing, looking at him. It was Angielo Cristofores, the *Camorrista*.

## CHAPTER XXIV

GHIRLAINE, in the portico, had seen Sebastian climb the hill-path, and turn aside, through the groves, toward the temple. Soon afterward, Annibale had left his post among the cactus-hedges, come up to the villa, commented on the doings of the doctors and the carabinieri, then gone on to the northern cliffs, in order to scramble down and draw his nets. But she had continued to search the slope which both had travelled, convinced that some one else would follow soon. And presently, as twilight was rushing in, for a moment she saw through distant foliage a panama hat.

She left the house, broke through the northern thickets, traversed the narrow cliff-path, approached the temple. She was just in time to see the *Camorrista* glide inside. In another moment, on swift but noiseless feet, she reached the door. She came too late for warning, but not too late to hear the first words of that encounter.

It was the *Camorrista* who spoke first, in French. And from the tone of his voice she felt that he did so, even at this moment, because he was proud of his mastery and excellent pronunciation of that language, as he was proud of his fastidious attire, his jewelled rings, and the quasi-gentlemanly air which he maintained, no doubt, through all his villainy.

He had said:

"I disturb you, Monsieur? But it is so difficult to find an opportunity for uninterrupted conversation."

Sebastian's voice responded, calmly:

"Quite so. But take care where you step, Monsieur Cristofores. There's a trap almost under your feet. Put your weight on it, and you go shooting down toward the caves."

A silence. At length, the *Camorrista's* voice:

"*Tiens!* This is curious, eh? Not only the little arrangements of this place, but also the fact that you tell me of them. And—most curious of all—since you know my name?"

"Oh, as for that! Fame will out, you know, like murder."

"Ah, Monsieur, I beg of you no flattery. Yet, at least, knowing my name, that saves us a pile of tiresome preliminaries."

"Precisely. . . . Pardon the digression, but do you find it uncomfortably cold in here?"

"Because I have my hands in my pockets?"

"Perhaps."

"But you also, Monsieur, it seems to me, have your hand in your pocket."

Sebastian laughed gently.

"The last time I looked at my candle-end it was guttering. And the sun is gone. So presently we sha'n't be able to see each other. And that would be fatal to our argument."

It was the *Camorrista* who laughed now, like a man

who has entered fully into the spirit of the occasion. He said:

"At least, confess that both of us have means of making lights!"

"Oh, I should have too much advantage of you then. I know this place like my pocket. It wouldn't be I who might step on the trap by mistake, and find myself suddenly with Nino."

In the long pause that followed, Ghirlaine crept inside the threshold and leaned, with pounding heart, against the stone screen that hid the sanctuary. She pictured the scene within: the two men, alert, hands clasping hidden weapons, staring at each other unwinkingly across the pitfall. If she made some sound, perhaps for one instant the *Camorrista* would be disconcerted, and give Sebastian his chance? But she was afraid to set loose that crash of tragedy, of which the issue might easily be two deaths instead of one.

She heard the stranger:

"So this is the road that Nino took!"

And, half apologetically:

"You must understand, Monsieur, that I'm not much interested in the affairs of that little animal *per se*. In his case, it's not the person, but the principle. So with the other two. They were much more useful parts than he, but still quite ordinary. By far too ordinary for their last performance, Monsieur. That was because we had the misfortune to underestimate you. But since they suffered, also, something had to be done. Nowadays, in most

states, a ruler who fails to protect and avenge his people, even the humblest, is not for long a popular ruler."

"Your sense of responsibility does you credit."

"When this affair commenced, I was much occupied with politics. Otherwise, perhaps I shouldn't have consented to operations so far afield. But what would you have? This has been a thin year for our poor fellows at home. We aren't what we were before the process at Viterbo. Many of our men were out of work month in, month out. They clamored to take up this job. I let them come. . . .

"Monsieur, in Naples, at the present moment, they are waiting for Mastro Angiolo Cristoforo to tell them that in our hypothetical ledgers they may write against the unfortunate incident at Torregiante, 'Acquitted.' You perceive my dilemma?"

"Naturally, Monsieur. The candle is going out; and I perceive that you have no choice but to take your hands from your pockets."

Ghirlaine, beyond the screen, straightened her trembling limbs, and took one stealthy step. Was it the moment? . . .

The *Camorrista's* voice arrested her.

"Monsieur, I beg of you to believe that if I haven't already done so, it isn't through any hesitation of which a man might be ashamed."

"I've always been a fair judge of a brave man, my friend."

"Thank you. . . . No, it is something else. Though, after all, I don't know precisely whether I

ought to be ashamed of it or not. . . . Look here. Shall I confess that all this while I've had my hands in my pockets merely in the interests of self-preservation?"

"Of self-preservation?"

"Of nothing else, *parbleu!* . . . Soon after my arrival here, I began to surmise that you were aware of the second object of my visit—the one that didn't concern my brother. From my observations, I presumed that you were one who would meet a dilemma at least half-way. That you would be the very man to recall the useful adage, 'It's the first shot that counts.' . . ."

"The candle is out, Monsieur Cristoforos. But if you wish you can move to another spot, as I have done, and go on talking. With these echoes, one's voice might come from anywhere. Only, be careful of the pitfall. It was just before you, as you were standing when I last saw you. . . ."

"Why do you insist on giving me that advantage, Monsieur?"

"It's not an advantage. I merely put you on equal ground with myself. No duel is a duel, I take it, unless the ground is equal. As you were saying?"

The *Camorrista* did not reply till Ghirlaine's heart had thumped a score of times. Then:

"Monsieur, when I came to Torregiante, I expected to find a simpler situation. A rich man, living here for purposes of his own—a 'big piece,' as we say, much like the general run of big pieces. But instead I found a man in rough clothes working among these



pig-sties like a hundred devils, trying to pull these poor brutes out of their predicament, doing the work of my own countrymen for nothing. As I should never have been tempted to do it. As no one else of my acquaintance would have been tempted to do it, who was not a doctor or a soldier under orders.

"Name of God! If I wouldn't have done it, at least I could appreciate it! You were a fool to risk your life that way, for beasts who could never know how much you were staked to lose—but it was a splendid kind of folly, Monsieur! The kind we others sometimes dream of being capable of. The kind a man wonders at, and envies.

"In a word, you weren't the one I had expected to find. It wouldn't do. If I had come before the cholera, well and good; for I should never have known the man I was killing. How often, I wonder, do we know the man we're killing? . . .

"But after the cholera? Does one stab at a man who has just clambered out of the sea, after saving one's brother? For, in effect, these are my brothers. Society has turned down its thumbs on them, as it has on me, though in another way. They are my brothers, and you have been good to them. And at the same time, you've been good to yourself!

"In Naples, Monsieur, I'm known as a man of my word. Perhaps when a rich man has to leave his wife and children and valuables alone in his villa at Posilipo he sends for me, we arrange the price, and my word is given for their safety. After that, so long as he's away, his family could go to bed with

doors and windows open, and the lowest man who leads the free life in Naples wouldn't even loiter at their gates. When I say, 'This man is safe,' he is safe.

"Now, Monsieur, I tell you this. For the sake of the cholera days in Torregiante, you are safe, henceforth, from all annoyance of the Camorra. And your lady is safe. And all your household. And the man who said 'no' to that would reckon with me, Angiolo Cristofores. And there are very few, I think, in Naples, who would care to reckon with Angiolo Cristofores."

He stopped, hesitated, and cleared his throat, as if embarrassed. In the end:

"Look here, Monsieur. I— If you care to forget where I have dipped my fingers from time to time, I should like to shake hands with you. The left hand, if you still have doubts. It would be a satisfaction."

A pause. . . . Was it a trick? . . .

Footsteps sounded. In the dusky vestibule Ghirlaine drew back. The *Camorrista* emerged, and walked away quickly through the shadows. And dimly she saw Sebastian close at hand, peering down at her.

"What are you here for?"

She gave no answer. He raised his head, and looked round him.

"Which way did he go?"

She made a gesture, and let her hand fall limply. He said:

"Let's get back to the house."

They returned to the villa.

It was already night. The blue-black sky was full of stars, and these the sea faintly reflected from a myriad ripples—covered, one would say, as by a glittering net. The flowers of the terrace gave forth a stronger, sweeter perfume than in daytime. In the groves, a nightingale was warbling. And out of the illimitable zenith something immense and soft and fragrant, like a vast kiss, embraced the odorous earth.

Far below shone the warm lights of the village and the steam-boat. Little sparks of yellow, they sent their signals up to this towering headland as if out of a void that held another world. A world that these two had passed through—that these two had been forced, in passing through, to comprehend, before they could stand here, with all their most subtle faculties rousing to wakefulness.

That world, which those lights seemed to epitomize! He, for his part, turned back in contemplation of its ignorance and cruelty, its folly and depravity. Almost in its true colors he saw it now. He wondered whether, at this moment, he might have seen it altogether truly if, like a psychic medium who reads some human riddle, he could have held her hand awhile?

The words escaped him:

"So the old man was right!"

She faced him slowly, as if returning from a distance.

"What old man?"

"Some one you never knew, I think. An old philosopher near Rome. John Elzevir."

"I've heard his name. What did he say?"

Sebastian sat down on the edge of the portico. She remained standing there, shining dimly in the starlight, staring at his indistinct visage.

"What did he say?"

And Sebastian repeated:

"For always, though he may not know it, man is hunting, hunting, hunting, perhaps through his error in the very mire of debauchery, for the inestimable jewel. The talisman to unlock all things that are necessary for us, in this world. . . ."

She did not move. And presently he went on:

"But it was another old man, here in Torregiante, who uttered the complement of that speech."

"What?"

"In short, that it was useless for some to hunt. 'Since nothing comes to us that is not of the nature of ourselves. . . .'"

For a while she was silent. At last:

"One must rise!"

He looked up at her face, which seemed, in the star-light, to have a new, celestial quality. Again he shook his head.

"Too far. The inestimable jewel would have to hang lower than it does. It would have to hang too low. Do the divine white stars come down to touch the earth?"

Suddenly she stretched out her arm.

"There! On the horizon."

"An illusion."

"What else is anything?"

"The horizon, unhappily, is always the same distance from us."

"And yet, all our happiness, all our real happiness, is in struggling on toward it. And since that is so, who shall dare to say that some day we may not attain it? . . . See where they bend down there, and meet the earth. Heaven and water mingle there. That which has always been serene mingles with what has often been convulsed. What has always been serene? But even the still stars have known their cataclysms!"

He came to his feet. But the portico stood empty. She was gone.

Presently he went down into the groves. And Nature enveloped him more closely, more personally, than ever. The rustle of the leaves was like a whisper for his ear. The obscurity gave forth, now and then, as it were the suggestion of some presence, at once infinitely remote and exquisitely intimate. He thought of Saint Giosuè. "For this was the Isle of Life: and the voices of the Old Ones troubled me. . . ." He stood still, looked round him, and said aloud, grinning painfully, with one more flicker of cynicism:

"Then in such a famous place, is it too much to ask some sign—some trifling miracle?"

But he heard again the quavering voice of Don Vigilio:

"From within, not from without. We ourselves are the field, if we but cleared away the weeds. . . ."

"Too little time, even if the reward were sure!

Any hour, now, they may be here. Something tells me that at this moment they're well on their way at last."

For now that his anxiety concerning the cholera and the *Camorrista* was ended, he had a sense of foreboding more profound than hitherto. Was it not that his hour had almost struck?

What would happen then? He reflected:

"From the stand-point of the world up there, my insanity has done for both of us. But she will have gained nothing in return. While I, at least, have gained something."

For he felt that he was no longer the man he had been. And he would never have believed that such a feeling could have brought him exultation.

Yet it had brought him exultation in the very midst of his despair. For he had already perceived himself to be an ampler, a more universal being. He had almost entered those fields of emotion which so many others knew. He had glimpsed what had so chafed him, and embittered him, in the past, because he could not see it. And he had risen a little way toward the inestimable jewel.

"But only to see it vanish forever, to-morrow, next day!"

Far better to put such thoughts out of his mind, and prepare to end his career, as they would say, "consistently."

Still, at dawn, instead of such preparations, he wended his way across the uplands toward the hermit's hut.

The hermit was sitting before his door. His hands, entwined with the coarse rosary, lay idle in the lap of his brown robe. His head was bowed forward, so that his long hair hung about his face. But at length he raised his head, let his melancholy young eyes roam round, and saw Sebastian standing under the sweet-lemon tree. The visitor advanced, and sat down beside the hermit.

"Well, my friend, how goes it to-day? Do you move forward?"

The recluse considered this question for a while, then answered, in dull tones:

"God forgive me—as a man goes forward who still finds that he drags heavy chains."

"Ah! Perhaps because, after all, you're overyoung to try this road? It's only when we're old, I fancy, that those chains begin to fall from us."

The hermit made a sudden gesture.

"There is no virtue in release, unless we've fought for it."

Sebastian shrugged his shoulders.

"Pardon the opinion, but aren't you, in the last analysis, just fighting human nature?"

The other smiled bitterly, but did not reply at once. Near by, on a rock aglisten with mica, a butterfly, fresh from its cocoon, was slowly airing its cerulean-blue wings. When he had stared for a time at this insect, the hermit said, in a low voice:

"If that were all! . . . No: if it were only nature, I shouldn't be here. In my case, nature has got so mixed up with perversity that there's been—that

there is still—no question of the one without the other.”

He paused, looked at Sebastian askance, and went on quietly, though his voice was unsteady:

“Up there, it was always depravity that attracted me most strongly. The curious, the abnormal, the vicious. I was aware of this. I wasn’t like those who blacken their souls as it were unconsciously. All the while, I perceived the Ideal, far above me, dim but constant. And nothing that I did in discord with that ideal brought me anything but misery. Yet I was unable to act otherwise! Always it was perversity that drew me, that nauseated me, and yet held me tight, that gave me a terrible satisfaction and a terrible remorse. You can hardly understand such a state of things, no doubt.”

Sebastian made no reply. On the mica-streaked rock, the blue butterfly slowly aired its wings. The recluse went on:

“Then there came across my path a certain one who contained, as it seemed to me, all the condensed evil of the world. The Scarlet Woman personified, full of a most perilous poison, and poisoning all she looked at. And though I recognized her at once for what she was, I could not escape. The supreme evil in her effected in me the supreme fascination. She was all of cruelty, and ruthlessness, and spiritual death, in one body—and I embraced her. And it was not till she threw me away with a laugh . . .

“Even then I wasn’t cured. For it was she, not I, who had tired. And of course it is always the one who tires that forgets.



"I pursued her. What ignominy! The harsh words of servants made insolent by their mistress's contempt! Doors shut in my face, then the sight of the successor entering! Long vigils beneath lighted windows, in the rain, and then the light extinguished! . . . I went through all that, many times. I was like a man who has been thrust out of an Inferno, scorched and maimed, yet struggles frantically to get back. . . . But you won't understand me!"

Sebastian said nothing. Under the wild-olive trees, another blue butterfly was fluttering now, amid the thick-sown marigolds. The hermit continued:

"One night in Rome, after such a scene, I was dragging my feet at random through the misty streets. I came to the door of a great house, some palace perhaps, and the *portone* was ablaze with torches. It was a *festa*: carriages were drawing up. Still dazed, I stood in the gutter, among the beggars and the poor folk, without knowing that I was there, and watched the people going in.

"And all at once, there alighted from one automobile a woman, tall, fair, shining, who should have worn great wings—a woman with the face of an angel. And at the sight of such a face, something broke in my heart. I said to myself: 'And what I am forced to choose! And what I am forced to choose! . . .' I sank down against the wall: I had eaten nothing all day; my last copper had gone in following that other. Some poor neighbors, who thought I was ill, took me into their house. There was a crucifix before the bed, and I prayed for deliverance, as I had never prayed before. And next day I set out afoot, on this

pilgrimage, hoping to find deliverance at the end of it. And I think that if my brother troubles me no more, some day I shall. But God draws close to some, and stays close to some, more readily than to others."

He was silent. The blue butterfly from beneath the wild-olive trees joined the butterfly on the rock. And together, fluttering, they rose into the air, and grew small against the bright sky of the new day.

Sebastian went down through the olive-groves, toward the village, thinking that this man's past was but the more enlightened duplicate of his own, and that a very similar influence had meant for both the turning-point. "Tall and shining, who should have worn great wings, with the face of an angel. . . ."

In the village, all was changed: Torregiante seemed Torregiante no longer. The carabineers paced the esplanade in pairs. The hospital orderlies were emerging from alleyways that they left white with disinfectant. Behind the houses, mattresses and bed-steads were being burned. On the eastern promontory, some doctors, clad in white duck, smoking cigarettes, were talking with Don Vigilio.

While making for the parish-house, Sebastian passed them. They intercepted him, to offer fresh compliments. Their chief, an erect, long-nosed little man with the mustache and peaked beard of a cavalier, became lyrical in his praise.

"With nothing at hand—but absolutely nothing—you contrived the basic remedies. It was colossal, Signore! Given a few days more, I suspect you would have found opium. . . ."

Sebastian listened absent-mindedly. When they stopped, he thanked them, and went on. He had hardly seen them.

One said:

"A strange man."

Another inquired:

"A Russian, did you say?"

And a third:

"Let's hope we catch a sight of his wife."

"Do you know, by the way, their being cast up here is highly curious? Especially since it was just about that time . . ."

Sebastian entered the parish-house, and went to Little Paganni's cot.

The boy was awake. His large eyes, mobile once more, turned from black to clear blue, when they perceived Sebastian. His brows contracted; then his lips parted in a faint smile. He said, weakly:

"Signuri, these strangers in their white clothes annoy us men in here, with their foolish goings on. They stick a glass needle in my mouth. You didn't do that when I was sick. Why do they do it, then, when I'm well again? Next time I shall do like old Ilario. He bit the glass needle in two, and spat it out at them. And he said things very useful when one's dealing with donkeys."

Sebastian sat down, and took Little Paganni's hand.

"And how do you feel now, Pan?"

"Tired of this house. I like the trees better. What will become of the goats? Are they penned in some cellar? All this day, I've thought I heard them

bleating for me to let them out. It was terrible! They need the open. No more was I made to be cooped up in so small a place, Signuri!"

"So I think also, Little Paganni. In fact, if it lay with me . . . Tell me; you're not afraid of me any more?"

The boy turned his head away fretfully.

"Eh! Why did you make me think of all that again?"

He looked down at his breast.

"Anyway, I still have on my amulet."

"It didn't keep you from catching the cholera."

"Perhaps not. But it made me well."

He looked sideways at Sebastian with his elfin eyes, then added, slowly:

"My *babba* says it was you!"

"Very foolish of him, I'm sure."

"So I say to myself. Not to him. . . . My mamma also. She says I must remember you always in my prayers to the Madonna. What do you think about that, Signuri?"

"That it would probably be a waste of your valuable time."

"Well. . . . That wasn't my thought, exactly. I said to myself that if I spoke of you, the Madonna might not be any too pleased. One has to look out what kind of language one uses before the Madonna. Swearing by mistake, or mentioning 'pig,' or bringing in the names of people she's not friendly with— Unless, of course, to ask an apoplexy on them——"

"Might get one into hot water."

"That's it, Signuri. So that's settled. . . . Now, I think I should like to go to sleep. Since there's nothing better to do."

He closed his eyes, and his childish face, surrounded by auburn curls, soon became placid. But Sebastian sat there for half an hour longer, holding the small hand that Little Paganni had forgotten to withdraw.

Meanwhile, on the northern cliffs, Ghirlaine was looking out toward Italy.

She was surprised to find the sea still empty.

Ever since the coming of the doctors, the other world, till lately as if buried forever beneath that far horizon, had been creeping in across the glittering waves. All morning, she had been enveloped closer and closer with old influences. Was not the dream on the very point of changing into reality, reality about to change into the dream?

The breeze sighed through the rich-hued foliage. The brilliant flowers nodded on the brink. The warm sunshine lay on rock and water, gilding the fantastic contours of the cliffs with an unnatural splendor, painting the waves with a more poignant blue than nature's. And that expanse of mobile blue seemed infinite no longer, but all too narrow—for one who did not dare to face the future.

An hour passed. . . .

Directly in the north, a faint smudge of smoke appeared.

Another hour, in which she scarcely moved. . . .

Now she descried through the binoculars a white-

hulled yacht, with yellow woodwork, that came on relentlessly. Every moment, its black smoke was whipped away and scattered, in wide-sailing films. Its brass fittings flashed, as the bow went up and down. On its deck were spots of black and white.

The yacht turned out, in order to make a wide detour round the western headland. Its length was exposed. She saw tiny figures. Perhaps half a dozen in dark garments. Two in light clothes, who stood together aft. Sometimes the dark figures moved. The two white figures remained motionless, close to the stiff Italian flag.

She could distinguish nothing more. But she was sure that one of the white figures was Sangallo.

She ran through the thickets to the villa, dizzy, sick with dread, but driven by the thought that she would see them clearly, when they had rounded the headland. In the portico, leaning against a pillar, the glasses pressed to her tumultuous bosom, she waited.

Once she cast her eyes toward the village. She saw, far below, Sebastian climbing the hill-path. Half-way up, he turned in, and disappeared among the trees. He was going to the northern cliffs. He would miss sighting them. He would not know they had arrived. After all, the supreme moment would find him unprepared!

The yacht rounded the headland. Now, through the glasses, she saw with startling distinctness. There were men in blue caps and jerseys. Two others, one in white flannels, one in a light travelling-suit. The

first handed a pair of binoculars to the second, who raised them before his face.

The first was Sangallo.

The man in the travelling-suit lowered the glasses. . . .

Her own binoculars crashed on the pavement of the portico. Swaying, she caught at the pillar for support.

The second man was Vincent Pamfort.

## CHAPTER XXV

SHE found Sebastian before the temple, on the edge of the sheer precipice, staring asea. Against the blue, his tall figure showed an unnatural decrepitude, as if at last his physical powers had begun to fail him. And at her approach, he turned to her a face that startled her even at this moment, a face suddenly older, almost ugly, dull, in which, as it were, a light had been extinguished. He looked like a man who had just been listening to his death-warrant.

So, as she halted before him, she felt that he must know already of the arrival of the rescuers. It was easier, on that account, to begin her plea:

"I think I've never asked anything of you yet. But now I ask you, let there be no more horrors. Since they're here at last, let them come up in peace."

He stared at her.

"I don't understand."

She repeated:

"Since they're here——"

"Since who's here?"

"Then you haven't seen them!"

He continued to stare, almost stupidly.

"Then you haven't seen the yacht!"

For an instant, his eyes lighted terribly. His voice sounded, harsh and ragged:



"Sangallo! That's it?"

Nerving herself for what she had to accomplish:

"That's it. They're close to land already."

He laughed, in a way to turn her cold.

"Why, just in the nick of time!"

Beside herself, she put her hand on his arm, and cried:

"No!"

He stepped back, shaking off her hand. He recoiled from her, as if he feared that touch, that first voluntary contact which had ever come from her to him. Then his disordered features became dull again.

"So they've not yet landed?"

"Not yet."

"Then we still have time for one more talk. Let's sit down somewhere. I must get off my feet. The fact is, I'm done up. I've been going too long. And, rather inopportunistly, I've come to the reaction."

He led the way to the temple, and seated himself on one of the fallen columns that lay against the mossy wall. When she still remained standing, he looked up at her with a smile.

"Pardon me for being uncivilized to the last."

She made a quick gesture of distress, and glanced round her apprehensively. He went on, still smiling:

"Come: humor me once more. Do you remember the Hunt Meeting in the Campagna, the herdsman's hut, the bench by the door? You hesitated then, too. I persuaded you, I think, by saying,

'Kindness will never seem amiss in you.' Nor will it even now, when there's so much less excuse for kindness. . . ."

She sat down on the fallen column, leaned forward, and stared into his face. She seemed to be looking not at the iron creature that had been Sebastian Maure, but at another, who was crumbling to pieces before her eyes.

"You're ill," she said.

"I'm worn out. What does it matter? . . .

"I only want you to know that I realize all I've done. That I understand the enormity of the whole thing. How far it goes beyond excuse.

"That night, in the villa, I showed you how I had excused myself. I said: 'A man desires a woman. Everything rises up to oppose him. He breaks through all opposition and takes her. And that's what every man, who has loved and been denied, would do if he had the courage. . . .'

"I was a fool. I spoke knowing men, possibly, but without knowing women. For I've never known women. I've had something to do with them, but I've never known them. For always I've gravitated to the sort—and they exist in every stratum of society—who were only what I wanted them to be. And if, by any chance, another influence began to change them, to make them what I didn't want them to be, that was the moment when something, Fate, if you will, separated our paths forever."

He paused. There rose before him the picture of the great glittering state apartments in the Palazzo

Campobasso, the thronging guests, and Mme. Sémadéni, robed in green satin, her bosom covered with emeralds, her eyes fixed on his with an inscrutable sadness. And their words returned to him. "Sebastian, you are not happy. . . ." "That is easily remedied? . . ." "Good-night, my poor friend. . . ."

He nodded, and said aloud:

"As if it was my destiny never to learn then, from personal experience, that women could be otherwise. That there were some who could never be taken so. . . ."

Leaning his head against the temple wall, he closed his eyes. His face was colorless, and almost ghastly. He seemed physically ill. But he went on, abruptly, in an unnaturally distinct, hard voice:

"I knew nothing of women. Nothing! Nothing! All my life, their real selves had avoided me. I had met with only the part of them that my brutality wanted to meet. I had seen only the part of them that my perversity wanted to see. And they had shown me nothing else. Why should they? The great mysteries of the sanctuaries are for those who have purified themselves at the gates. And I had always come in polluted. I never got farther than the forecourt of that temple. . . ."

"Nothing happens to us that is not of the nature of ourselves. . . ."

"Yet I met you!"

"Why should our paths have crossed? Why, when they had, shouldn't it have been as it had always been before, when I'd crossed the path of a

being not of the nature of myself? For consistency's sake, I ought to have passed straight on.

"And yet, I'd never known a desire for anything even vaguely comparable to what I felt in that first moment, in the midst of that French country-side, at the Montlhéry's château.

"And you surely felt the strength of that in me! At that instant, suddenly you were badly shocked, and possibly frightened. Did you feel, too, as if things had all at once gone strangely wrong? As if we'd had there an emotional contact that Fate should never logically have produced?"

He remained silent for a while, looking before him heavily at the flowers on the brink.

"Well, nothing that I've ever met with in life has been consistent. Except you! . . .

"For you have always been the fixed star. Through everything unchanged. And to-day I'm able to appreciate that radiance for what it is. Once I depreciated it, and scoffed at it, and insulted it. As I see it now, I wouldn't have had you otherwise.

"I've found out that all men, all, must look up to something, sooner or later. They can't stand not doing that forever. The instinct for worship, for adoration, is in the last one of us. This one worships a supreme God. That one some supreme form of beauty. Another, a supreme exactitude of science or of art. But always, sooner or later, something above and beyond, that one would like to live by. An ideal condition of things. An entity that ap-

proaches the ideal. . . . But that fixed star must not grow dim, or smaller.

"Yet once I struggled with all my might to abase that star! For I didn't realize what it meant, what it was going to mean, or that its supreme virtue lay in its great distance above me. That if I could have brought it down within my reach, I should never have seen so far, over so strange and wonderful a country, as I've seen lately by the light of it. . . .

"What a fummy life it's been! Beating at nothing in a fog! Ploughing in circles in the mud! Breaking and wrecking everything, at last, to prove one's self on the level of the beasts! . . . What haven't you been through! And now I can't make restitution. . . ."

He bowed his head. His hands lay on his knees, strong and yet delicate, subtly ruthless-looking yet informed with nobility, like a composite of the hands of many individuals. Now they lay outstretched, upturned, half open, lax—as it were, in their remarkable expressiveness, worn fine by all their recent work, incapable of returning again to their old violence.

She averted her eyes from them reluctantly. He was saying:

"And the worst of it is, that you have only lost, while I've done nothing but gain!"

"I don't begrudge you that."

And, after pressing her handkerchief against her lips:

"I'm not what I was when I first came here, either.

I don't think I'm cruel any longer. I don't have cruel thoughts about this time that's coming. What you have to go through—if I could lighten it, I would. For I understand things better now. Many things.”

She turned her hazy eyes toward the sea.

“Many things. . . .”

He glanced up at her white profile and blowing golden hair, and at her wide-staring, swimming eyes. He drew in his breath, and murmured to himself:

“‘And at her departure, she appeared so beautiful that she seemed already to have become a soul in Paradise!’”

Through the sunshine, close to the nodding flowers of the brink, the bees came, darting and poisoning. The sound of their wings was mingled with the increasing murmur of the sea. In the temple, the Old Ones were stirring from their sleep. Ghirlaine shivered.

“Why are we here! So close to such a place! Where men have been killed! Where who knows what has happened!”

“Where can we go in this world where men haven't been killed, and brought to life?”

He listened. She could hear nothing save the droning of the bees, the murmur of the sea, and the low voices in the temple. But he exclaimed:

“Our time is up. . . . And I've told you nothing!”

“I think,” she answered, faintly, “that you've told me a great deal.”

“I should have liked to find the words to tell you everything. But no matter. Only, when you go back, when you're suffering up there for what I've

done, try not to hate me. A contrite heart! . . . Perhaps, from all the unhappiness that may come to you, you can, if you will, distil a certain balm by means of charity? . . .

"Happiness! That's what we're all struggling for, according to our lights. Remember that I, too, was searching for it, in the only way that had been revealed to me."

He was silent.

From the underbrush came a crackling of twigs. On the rim of the little valley, amid the green leaves, Annibale appeared, bareheaded, with his rifle. His voice reached them, urgent, full of suppressed excitement:

"Signuri, a new ship has come in. Two strangers are climbing to the villa."

"Two?"

Sebastian looked at Ghirlaine. She said, almost inaudibly:

"The other is Vincent Pamfort."

He leaned back against the wall.

"All one! Nothing matters now."

And to Annibale:

"They are friends of ours. Let them pass. Make them welcome. The Signura will see them now. I'll come presently."

To Ghirlaine:

"Go and meet them."

She rose, for a moment stood there trembling, then turned quickly away, and went to the villa.

On the eastern end of the portico, she waited be-

tween the white pillars. Her eyes were fixed on the thickly wooded slope, where the hill-path wound up, between the fir-trees all slanted in one direction by past gales, to lose itself, from time to time, amid the solemn-hued foliage of ilexes and cypresses. Not far from the summit was a clearing, banked round with cactus and aloes, where, in other days, Sebastian and Annibale, with weapons in their hands, had lain for futile hours in ambush. Now Annibale pointed to this clearing. And she saw entering it Sangallo and Vincent Pamfort.

They looked up, and halted. They perceived her. They came on, climbing faster. And presently they reached the summit.

Sangallo was first. Walking quickly, with his light, springing step, he approached her immediately, yet with an effect of holding back till his keen black eyes had plunged into her soul. His clear olive skin was pale against his jet-black beard. He was containing an intense emotion.

He sprang up on the portico, took her hand, and bore it to his lips. At once, he stood back, and flashed a swift look round him.

Vincent was standing before her.

He appeared thinner and more mature. His straw-colored mustache had been clipped short. His face was even more deeply tanned than formerly, and now suffused with blood. His eyeballs were red. Staring at her, those eyes seemed abnormal, filmy, full of something that resembled panic. She could hardly recognize him. He seemed like a stranger.



And all the while that they were staring, she kept thinking: "Why is *he* here? Why did *he* come here?"

And it was she who spoke first:

"Well, Vincent. . . ."

His lips moved. Standing rigid, he jerked out the words, in an abrupt, strained voice that she had never heard before:

"Ghirlaine! You're all right?"

This was the meeting that she had pictured in a hundred forms, but never thus!

Sangallo stepped back, so softly and slowly that neither of the others noticed his withdrawal. He turned to Annibale, who was standing below, his rifle over his arm, close to the portico, still as a statue, his smouldering eyes focussed like burning-glasses on Vincent Pamfort's face. Sangallo spoke to him quietly:

"Where is your master?"

Reluctantly, Annibale transferred his scrutiny to Sangallo. He measured the other with deliberation from head to foot. His eyes lost something of their dangerous fire.

"My master is yonder."

"Take me to him."

Annibale sent one more long stare at Vincent Pamfort. Then:

"Follow me, Signuri. Or rather, go in front."

And, as he directed Sangallo toward the northern cliffs, coolly, without the slightest subterfuge, he passed his hand over the other's clothes, and felt of all his pockets.

Sebastian was still sitting on the fallen column, his head against the temple wall. Annibale, halting before him, exclaimed, in a loud, bitter voice:

"Here is one of your friends, Signuri!"

From under his drooping eyelids Sebastian regarded Sangallo with his fixed smile.

"Very well, Annibale. Leave me with this friend of mine."

"I am to leave you, Signuri?"

"So I said."

The young man drew a long breath into his deep chest.

"*Va beni, Signuri.* I will go back to the villa, to your other friend, in case he should require any attention before you come."

"Do so. And above all things, Annibale, hospitality. A precious and ancient virtue, known even to barbarians."

The outlaw departed.

Sangallo sat down beside Sebastian, and held out his hand.

"My dear friend!"

To that gesture the other made no response, except to say:

"Excuse me. For your own benefit. I've touched no one, of late, but cholera patients. I sleep in odd corners, and eat in the street. I begin to think I drip with bacilli. It's become an *idée fixe* with me. To be sure, since the doctors came, I've drenched myself with disinfectants. But the habit persists. You understand."

Sangallo clasped his hands across his knee, and stared.

"You're a sick man, Sebastian!"

"I? Not in the least. Only, one can't go on forever. And I don't sleep when I get the chance. Light the candle at both ends, you know. I'm burnt out, that's all. But now that it's all finished, I'll get my rest at last."

Sangallo shook his head.

"I don't like your looks at all!"

Sebastian smiled grimly.

"I'm not surprised. Who the devil does, at this moment?"

"I tell you, you're a sick man!"

"Well, I'll agree with you, if you insist. I'm sick to the bone—of myself. For the sake of your own attitude toward life, admit the possibilities of a spiritual illness. Have we two got to argue, at last, you for unadulterated materialism, and I for the other thing? Let's not wrangle. I'm not up to it to-day."

He considered for a while, and said:

"Here's one thing I want to get off my mind. One night, she was exposed to the cholera herself. I think it's all right, you know. But the time's not up yet. Where are you going to take her?"

"To Naples. They'll let us in there. They've still got a little cholera there, too. And Lady Maude's in Naples."

"Oh? Well, there are some good doctors in Naples. Don't let her go on a ship just yet. Ship's doctors—I'd trust myself first! . . . That's all about

that. Just watch her. If she seems out of sorts, get the jump on it. . . . So Lady Maude's in Naples. What about her aunt?"

"America. She'd quite given her up."

"Ah! . . . By the way, Ernesto, if it's really fair to ask, what made you so long in coming?"

Sangallo smoothed his black beard reflectively, and hesitated.

"*Ebbene*, several things made me long in coming. Several things very curiously interacting. . . .

"You surmised, of course, that the carabinieri would send in their report? You gave a Russian name—I presume on the spur of the moment. The next moment, naturally, you knew that it would be passed on to the Russian Consulate General at Rome.

"So it was, in due course of time. The Consulate wrote to the Consular Agent at Tunis, and to the Bureau of Passports in Saint Petersburg. And the reply from the Bureau, that no such Russian was travelling, came, by some error, not to the Consulate General, but the Embassy. And since it was summer, and half the Embassy staff were away, Andreas Romanovitch happened to be *chargé d'affaires*.

"I was in Piedmont. He telegraphed to me at once. My first thought was the same as his—too strong a coincidence not to mean something! But I knew what he couldn't have known: who the man might be. How it might barely have happened. Incredible? But my thoughts, if you'll pardon me, had flashed out toward an incredible sort of man.

"I hurried to Rome. Andreas had kept it quiet.

We telegraphed to Tunis. We sent to the Marshal of Carabineers, here in Torregiante, for further particulars. We expected our first answer in twelve hours. Meanwhile, I wrote you that letter. On a chance. To show you, if it was really you, that we knew. As it were, to pull you up short. If possible, to bring you a realization of the rational world, the consequences. . . .

"The twelve hours passed, and twelve more. I said to Andreas, 'I can't stand this delay. I'm going to Torregiante.' He was tied to the Embassy. He had to let me set out alone.

"That night, in Naples, while waiting for them to get ready the boat that was to bring me here, I walked in the Villa Nazionale, by the sea."

He paused, and stared fixedly before him. When he went on, reluctantly, his voice was lower.

"How am I going to make you understand the rest? It's one of the things that aren't told, that I shall probably never tell any one else but Andreas. It's something that's very difficult to put into words. Something for many to find unbelievable, in a sane man. . . . I give it to you as it happened.

"I was walking in the Villa, among the trees, with the faint flash of the sea showing through them. It was lonely there, quite late. Even the vagabonds had dragged themselves away.

"I stopped to look through the trees, southward, across the water. And presently, as I stood there, I felt coming to me one of those moments that I've known, not often, but oftener, I think, than most

men in the parts of the world we live in. A moment of half-release from physical encumbrances, of strange clairvoyance, of seeing, so to speak, into the hidden heart of things. Now I felt it coming to me again, that precious moment. And I told myself: 'In a little while I shall know the truth.' For it had never played me false. I'd learned to trust it.

"It came. There are no words to describe it, to one who doesn't know. That expanse of water didn't separate me any longer from knowledge, but linked me with knowledge. You understand I saw nothing—no vision, or anything of the sort. But I felt that a mute voice, from off there, had brought me that far, and yet was now staying me. That there had been a call for me, but that now the call was revoked. That something which had wanted me at first was now pleading with me, from afar and yet from very near, to come no closer. Unless I wanted to do irreparable harm instead of good. Unless I wanted to arrest something that must be developed. . . .

"It was even as if a great, overpowering denial had risen up to oppose me—a denial of my right to carry out what I was planning.

"As I said, I learned long ago to respect the influence of those moments. It's not reasonable, judged from our stand-points of reason. But what, after all, is our reason? How far does it reach? Beyond our reason there is so much that we never perceive, unless at such a time, when we almost see through, for one instant, into the heart of things.

"At any rate, when it had passed, my mind was

changed. I returned to the harbor, and countermanded my order for the boat. I stayed in Naples. I sent no word to Andreas. He wouldn't have understood, then.

"At last, waiting in Naples, I learned there was cholera in Torregiante. Cholera! That one word upset my equilibrium. It intruded on my conviction, and gave me terrible doubts. If I had held fast, even then, I should only have been obeying the dictates of that moment in the Villa Nazionale. But I couldn't hold fast any longer. Cholera! And I knew what such islands were. Cholera! I came back to earth. I became like any man. I saw myself a wild fool, a madman, a murderer. Still, even while I was telegraphing to Pamfort, I kept saying to myself: 'You are doing wrong! You are disobeying the moment that has never betrayed you.' My mind continued to be a battle-field till he arrived. . . . And all the time, as we approached this island, I kept repeating: 'Too soon! Too soon! . . .'"

His voice had grown husky; finally it failed him.

"And now, God forgive me, I know it!"

Sebastian's eyes were closed. At first, Sangallo wondered if he could be asleep. But presently he murmured:

"Curious. . . . You must use that bit some day."

Sangallo turned round and laid his hand on the temple wall.

"Who's inside this place!"

"No one."

"I hear voices."

"Natural phenomenon. Waves. Echo-well. Everything explicable. Matter and its aberrations. . . ."

His face was distorted. He made an effort to get up, sank back, and finally stood upright, unsteady, his cheeks glistening with sweat.

Sangallo caught him round the shoulder.

"What you need is a doctor!"

"Nonsense. Let's get to the house. He'll want a few words with me before he goes. Let's have it over with. . . ."



## CHAPTER XXVI

GHIRLAINE was alone with Vincent in the portico.

Strangely detached from the event she had so greatly feared, she had led him to the wicker chairs. "Come," she had said, "sit down." And to herself: "I suppose I must tell him, I suppose I owe it to him, and to myself, to tell him how it all happened." So, as if recounting the story of another woman who had ceased to exist, she told him of her coming to Torregiante. And all the while, watching his face, which had grown strange to her, she had realized he was quite unable to perceive the motives that had shaped those hours, and that she was unable, or unwilling, to force him to perceive them.

Their origin lay in regions that he had never passed through, that he would never approach. His face, mobile enough for once, a prey to misery, fury, and bewilderment, expressed comprehension only of the enormity and outrage of the thing—no slightest appreciation of its causes. For him it was just a nightmare, of which there ought to be no counterpart in life. And she, who had felt at first as he was feeling now, but had learned of late almost to understand, kept thinking, while her lips went on with that tale: "Why do I tell him? To understand, one must have felt. And it is not necessary that he should understand. . . ."

For unconsciously her telling had nearly grown into an apology for the other.

She stopped. A long silence ensued. From the beds of sweet-marjoram and thyme, on the bright-hued terrace, came the humming of wild bees. And that music seemed to her still to accompany the words: "I too was searching for it, in the only way that had been revealed to me."

But this one could never thrill with pity at the poignancy of that confession! . . .

"Good God! What a thing for you to have gone through!"

His eyes grew redder. His clenched hands trembled. In a whisper:

"What a blackguard! What an unspeakable blackguard!"

He sprang to his feet, his lean figure quivering, and went quickly to the eastern end of the portico.

"Where is he now?"

Some distance off, under the trees, Annibale was squatting, in the attitude of a seated Arab, on the grass. His rifle lay across his knees. With caressing fingers, he was softly working the breech-lock back and forth. He looked up, and fixed his eyes steadily on the "foreigner." Very gently his right hand went round the rifle-lock, and grasped the trigger. His eyes became blank. His young, savagely handsome face turned slowly older-looking, and coldly cruel.

"Come back," said Ghirlaine in level tones.

"Come back here, Vincent. Sit down. We're not through, yet, with this."

"That ruffian, that ragamuffin under the trees——"

She called:

"Annibale?"

Annibale, still staring at the stranger, answered, calmly:

"*Sissignura*."

"What are you doing?"

"I am breathing the air, Signura."

"Please go away."

Her voice broke.

"*Sissignura*."

But he continued in the same attitude, as if carved out of dark-brown wood, staring unwinkingly at Vincent.

"Vincent. . . . Vincent!"

He returned to her, and stood biting the short ends of his mustache.

"Sit down."

He remained standing, erect, slim, rigid, one hand on his hip.

"What is it?" he said, in a low, steady voice. "Have we walked into a trap? What's become of Sangallo?"

"Nothing will happen, Vincent. I have his word that nothing will happen."

"His word!"

He laughed. She flashed a strange look at him, then closed her eyes. After a while:

"Won't you tell me at least about my aunt?"

He started and flushed deeply.

"Forgive me, Ghirlaine. . . . She's gone home. She still thinks you were lost in the sea. As we all thought. . . . What a terrible time for us that was! Almost as terrible——"

"Yes."

He pulled himself together. Standing very straight, his face expressionless, his eyes suffused, he got out, in a strained voice:

"You've been the victim of terrible circumstances. Of incredible things. Such things as don't happen. That turn the world upside down. But . . . How shall I say it? . . ."

He was struggling hard for expression. He was trying with all his powers to rise to this moment. She knew his nature, his inheritance, his past environment, all that was trying to prevent him from rising to this moment. And she felt a great compassion, an intense desire to relieve him of his task. Yet she knew that he must go on, and say what he was trying to say, in order that she might answer him. She remained silent, looking up at him, watching his struggle, full of pity.

She heard him stammering:

"It seems that such things really come about in life, and that we must meet them. The situations created for us, whether by madmen or not—we must meet them. In a way fitting and proper. We find we have duties that we never thought to have. And somehow, we drive through. . . . That's what you and I must try to do."

He drew in his breath sharply.

"I don't know just how we're going to make it. I can't see ahead—who can? But one thing at a time; and let the rest wait till we come to it. We'll go back: that's understood, of course. We'll try to begin as we were going to begin, as if nothing had happened. How we'll make out, who can say? I don't mean between ourselves. It's the others. . . ."

For an instant his features were quite disorganized. He regained control of them.

"It's the others, naturally. . . ."

He squared his shoulders, and raised his chin, in a defiance that cost him she knew well how much. And his voice rang out:

"Let them all go hang! We'll drive through it, and judge what's right for ourselves!"

He had reached perhaps the finest moment of his life.

Her eyes filled with tears. She turned away, to look across the sea, westward, as she had looked so often, with such longing, in those first days on Torregiante. She shook her head.

"No, Vincent. Never that. You are brave. You are very brave, even though you can't know, to-day, all that you're braving. But I shall never call your bravery to a harder test. You must go back to England alone. You must return to the rational world, and be a part of it, unimpaired in any way for intercourse with it. For by the force of destiny you've always been, and you always must be, a part of it. You have a splendid name to hand on. It's come to you out of a rational world. It must

be passed on unaltered by contact with another sort. You'll marry there, safely, in the midst of that world, a woman who has never emerged from it. Such a woman's going to be Countess of Lemster, and the mother of your children. . . . Perhaps I know whom. Do you remember a ride of ours in the Borghese Gardens, and your telling me of the girl you thought you loved, before you met me?"

His face grew pale. What unexpected blow had she dealt there?

"But now that I've found you still on the earth, am I to resign myself to losing you again?"

Under her breath, she answered:

"Did you ever really have me?"

Aloud, however, only the response, as her thoughts went back to the northern cliffs:

"Some of us have to give up much, to escape from life-long misery. . . ."

Doggedly he muttered:

"I can't take that answer, here and now, you know. You're beyond yourself here. Later——"

"No, Vincent."

He looked down toward the harbor.

"The boat's waiting, steam up. How long will it take you to get ready?"

"I have nothing to get ready," she answered.

She gazed round her, at the far-sweeping amphitheatre of Torregiante, the great golden-brown peaks, the gray-green wooded slopes, the dazzling crescent of the village far below. The Isle of Life! But not as she had learned to know it. For now the world

of up there had pervaded it and altered it. Its vivid naturalness had become unreal. Its old influences, the secret influences that had been like sentient phantoms, ever gliding closer, through sunlight as well as starlight, were all withdrawing, before this uncomprehending, alien invasion.

"Then we go now?" he asked.

"As you wish. . . ."

And, at those words of hers, the soul of Torregiante seemed to have completed its withdrawal.

Then they saw Annibale on his feet beneath the trees, looking from them toward the northern thickets, and back again. Sangallo and Sebastian were approaching.

Midway between the thickets and the villa, Sebastian halted in the open. With an effort, he squared his shoulders, and looked at Ghirlaine and Vincent with his old calmness and inscrutability. He stood there, in the sunlit grassy clearing, like a man standing in a prison court-yard, his peace made, beyond the touch of every form of recrimination, waiting to be shot.

Sangallo came forward quickly. He was looking at Ghirlaine, and in that look appeared something like an intense appeal for pardon. With a jerk, Vincent transferred his red stare from Sebastian to Sangallo.

"We go at once."

"Ah!"

"Ghirlaine!"

She nodded, perfectly white. Almost inaudibly:

"First I must say good-by to the people who have been kind to me."

She went into the house.

"I am going away, Fannia."

But when she took the baby into her arms, the tears began to rain.

"Good-by. . . . Good-by. . . ."

She kissed the little neck, and Fannia's cheeks. She paused at the door of her own room. The night of the tempest returned to her. And the night of the cholera mob. And all the other nights. An empty room, bare, poor, but thronged with how many strange, new things!

"Good-by. . . ."

Fannia was weeping, violently, savagely, in a wild abandonment to amazed despair. Ghirlaine had finally to leave her so, crouching on her knees against the wall, the baby pressed tight against her breast, racked by long, shivering cries:

"*Oh, Madrecidda! . . . Oh, Madrecidda! . . .*"

"Good-by, Annibale. . . ."

His bewildered eyes searched hers. He made no reply. But she felt that a faithful dog would look just so, when left without explanation for the last time.

Her gaze turned to Sebastian. She went toward him suddenly across the grass.

Vincent made one step; but Sangallo took him by the arm. So, when she stood before the other, none were close enough to hear their words.

"Good-by."

His glistening face was covered with a bluish pal-



lor, cut deeply with new lines—the visage of a soul, and of a body, in torment. But at her words, his eyes brightened with a great light.

“You forgive me!”

His mouth twitched spasmodically, as he looked down into that transfigured countenance of hers.

“Yes. I must forgive you.”

“I know. To be yourself.”

“Good-by. . . .”

She returned to the others.

“Come, then,” said Sangallo to Vincent Pamfort. But that one, setting his jaws, responded:

“Not till I’ve had my word with him. Not till he knows I’m coming back, as soon as we’ve taken her to Naples.”

Sangallo smiled sadly, as he glanced from Vincent to Sebastian.

“When you come back—not now. I’m returning, too, as soon as possible. You can come with me, if you like.”

The three descended the hillside.

When they had nearly reached the clearing on the slope, Sebastian came to the edge, with heavy feet, and stood watching them. The light coats, the white dress, showed through the trees. They traversed the clearing without looking back. Presently they emerged on the lower hillside strewn with boulders. At last, they crossed the esplanade. A rowing-boat took them to the yacht.

From the portico, he watched the white yacht round the headland.

From the northern cliffs he saw it grow small on the bright water, and finally vanish.

She was gone.

He made his way back toward the villa. Half-way through the thickets his will power collapsed, and he began to stagger. For a time he stood still, gripping the thick vines all festooned with roses, striving to keep erect, grinding his teeth together. After a long while, he went on, leaning forward, his mouth open, gasping, his face streaming, his body shaken by tremors.

On the summit, he lurched to the left, and plunged down the hill-path toward the village.

His shoulders carromed from the tree-trunks. The roots and rocks caught at his feet, and sent him stumbling. He went on at a sort of shambling run, to keep from sinking down.

Near the end of the descent, he crashed forward on his knees. Everything whirled round, and disappeared in darkness. Through the darkness he saw strange shapes and faces, grotesque yet half familiar, repulsive and beautiful by turns, and always changing. For ages he knelt there, arms stiff, his knuckles braced against the rocks, while those altering shapes, at once ghastly and exquisite, fair and loathsome, thronged about him.

"The shapes of old crimes. . . ."

Suddenly, he shouted:

"Not here, like a dog! . . ."

He gathered together all his strength for one last effort, such as perhaps not another man in a hundred

could have put forth then. He wrenched himself erect, swayed forward, and went on, with outspread arms, going blind on his feet, the village before him rising into the skies, then sinking back to earth.

He was on the esplanade. A patch of white attracted him. Many people were running and chattering. Some cried out at him.

The patch of white drew near. He perceived, in the midst of whirling lights, a long nose, and the gray mustaches and peaked beard of a cavalier. An arm strove to hold him up, but he kept sinking down.

He heard his own voice muttering:

"I've got it. . . . Give me a bed. . . . No opium. . . . That's exploded. . . . In the Hamburg epidemic. . . ."

He dropped through the doctor's arms, and rolled out his full length on the esplanade. A hush descended. It seemed unbelievable to all, shocking, as it were against reason, that this great figure should be lying flat, at last, like any other.

They carried him to the parish-house: and all Torregiante followed behind the stretcher.

## CHAPTER XXVII

ONE afternoon, almost two months from the day of her departure, Sebastian Maure, bony and still colorless in his white flannels, was sitting in a wicker long-chair, in the portico of the villa on the western headland of Torregiante, reading a letter from Sangallo. It was steam-ship day: and Annibale had just brought this missive up from town, with another, postmarked "Constantinople," which Sebastian had not yet opened. The mail delivered, the young man, finding that his master required nothing, had gone round the house to join Fannia and the baby.

At that moment old Ilario was visiting on the hill-top, as befitted a father-in-law of three weeks' legal standing. He had brought up a cake, prepared in the Syndic's cook-shop, covered with daubs of pink and lilac sugar, and inscribed, for no apparent reason, in sugar writing, "*Evviva Maria Vergine.*" Now he was feeding small fragments of this confection to the baby, while drowning out his daughter's protests with profanity.

"Blood of all the Saints! And what do you know about the needs of children? A hen hatched one chicken and said to the goats: '*Eccu!* I am full of experience. In the spring, if you need a wise head, call on me!'"

"But, *babba*, I tell you that sugar and jelly aren't good for such little stomachs."

"*Mah!* And what did you eat at his age? At his age, your stomach was a museum! Here—a pink piece! Is it good? It ought to be. It cost me nearly a lira, and a good half-hour of bargaining with a proper brigand!"

"No more, *babba*, for charity!"

"What's the matter with you? The name of the Blessed Virgin is written all over it! What harm can it do him then, anyway? Sacrilegious hussy! Now leave me alone, for God's sake, or I'll have to take a hand to you. This is *my* grandson."

Sebastian returned to his letter.

*I am at work again, fortified by those long talks of ours in Torregiante during your convalescence, full of gladness at the thought that if I had not returned to you as soon as I did, nothing might have roused in you the determination to pull through. For a long time, I had felt a powerful inclination to be of service to you. I had, all the while, an impression that such a time must come. This is one more of those inexplicable things. . . .*

*In respect of another, I had the same feeling, in Rome, during the season, before all this came about. Have I failed on that side? Must I always reproach myself that I acted a poor part, perhaps a monstrous part, toward her, in listening, as long as I did, to what I told you of, that day of my first arrival? The two dilemmas were interwoven so closely. At one moment it would seem as if I had not arrived nearly soon enough; at another, as if I'd arrived too soon. Who knows, as yet? Nothing is ever finished.*

*She is in France. I must tell you that poor Mrs. Bellamy, who met her there, is dead. She died in Paris of ptomaine-poisoning. She had insisted on eating some oysters imported from America. One might say that she succumbed a martyr to her persistent patriotism. Poor woman, I am not making a*

jest about it. It is Fate that is the grim jester, in planting in us from the first the predilections, however trifling some of them may seem, that bring us gradually but inexorably to our supreme crises. . . .

Mrs. Bellamy is buried in Père-Lachaise Cemetery, and her niece is with the Monthèrys, now, at their château.

She has sent Lemster back to England. I understand she has no more close relations left. She must be so lonely; though in the letter I had from her, telling of Mrs. Bellamy's death, she said nothing of that. . . .

Don Livio Campobasso is still across the Channel. On the Twelfth, he went up into Scotland for the shooting. Princess Betty has been on the Lake of Garda, much by herself. (Did I tell you that Tito made it right with his Colonel, and that his regiment has gone to Brescia?) Well, at Garda, who should drop in from the clouds to take tea with Princess Betty but Mme. Séma-déni. She was on her way, as she told me afterward in Turin, from Florence to Milan. A roundabout way! At any rate, she stayed not only to tea, but two days longer. The morning after she left, Princess Campobasso set out for Scotland. She joined Don Livio there, and they are together there now. What a good woman that Russian is, beneath her affectation of languor and melancholy! And, for that matter, under Don Livio's impassiveness there must be more of unconventional comprehension than one might think.

But there is stranger news than that. Andreas Romanovitch is going to marry Donna Dora Brazzazza.

He discovered at last that the poor child was in love with him. And, as he wrote me from the Brazzazzas' place in Umbria, she had seen so much in life, from her wheel-chair, that she could never have! "It was," according to him, "the supreme chance for a worthless fellow to justify his existence. Besides," he told me, "I was ripe for the gentle, almost incorporeal comradeship that offered itself there. In serving that white little lily, I shall surely regain the age of innocence. To have fallen in love with inviolable purity is a miracle far greater than I deserved."

So, at least, he says, in his first exaltation. I am not saying he

*will feel just so always—or for very long! Or, indeed, that he will need to! For Donna Dora is rather marvellously changing since the engagement. It would seem as if new powers had begun to flow to her simultaneously with that new joy. She is stronger: and just the other day, between Don Giulio and Mme. de Chaumont, for a moment she stood erect, without faltering. What was it? Resignation giving way before the roused fundamental forces? Her will to be a wife? It may go no farther, of course. But at Lourdes, for instance, strange things have been accomplished by a supreme, intrinsically right desire of the heart.*

*In effect, we live in a miraculous world.*

*Write to me about how you are doing, and what you intend to do. . . .*

Sebastian laid the letter in his lap, and looked out on Torregiante.

Heights and lowlands, all softly mellow in the afternoon sunshine, lay drowsing in siesta. The groves formed round the amphitheatre of the slopes a great zone of peaceful, immobile green. Below, about the semicircle of the beach, the village, freed of all alien influences, itself once more, curved like a golden chain against the sapphire sea from which every flaw was smoothed away. And the intense silence of Nature—a silence not of emptiness, but of a teeming, yet ineffably subtle and serene activity—rose round the headland like the mute expression of a limitless Soul.

Presently, from the northern uplands, came a faint droning. He had heard that sound frequently of late. The hermit was walking in the groves, and singing as he walked. . . .

He got up slowly from his chair, and entered the house. At the threshold of her room, he paused,

swung the door open, and looked in. Everything was as if she had just left it. Her dresses hung against the walls, enshrouded with figured chintz. The chest of drawers was laid with glistening toilet articles in orderly array. On the bed was spread Fannia's *coperta del letto matrimoniale*. The candlesticks held new candles, the fireplace a heap of resinous boughs. And there were fresh flowers by the mirror—the sorts she had touched most often on the terrace.

He shut the door gently on this garnished place of memories, and returned to the long-chair in the portico. Presently he remembered the letter from Constantinople.

It was written on half a sheet of cross-barred café paper, in ill-spelled French.

*I have the honor to inform Monsieur that the letters to Disnisius Pappachzistos were evidently not answered by him because not called for, as he is lately deceased in Balikisri, at the hands of an old friend, a rich man, who has proved self-defence to the satisfaction of the law.*

*Hoping to serve Monsieur another time again, with humble evidences of my most distinguished consideration, N. Fakreddin, Manager of Café Osmanlie, new management and chef, private rooms lately refurnished.*

“So Disnisius, the matchlessly anticipating servant to the end, anticipated even his dismissal!”

He tore up the note, and dropped the fragments into the bottle-socket of the long-chair. He looked up, to see Don Vigilio's unkempt flat beaver hat rising to the hilltop.



Jumping to his feet, Sebastian hurried forward, and took the old man by the hands.

"But what are you thinking of, *Padre!* So long a climb, in the very heat of the day!"

When the priest had sat down, mopped his forehead and tonsure with a bandanna handkerchief, and recovered his breath, he answered:

"My son, I heard that letters had come for you. In our village, we're such incorrigible busybodies! I thought you might have got news of the great world up yonder. Some sort of good news, perhaps."

He peered at Sebastian out of his watery eyes, his perpetual thin smile somewhat unsteady.

"So I said to myself, 'No exertion could be too much, that leads to the sharing of good news?'"

"Well, you were right. There was good news in my letter."

"And?"

Sebastian shook his head.

"I'm afraid you're thinking again of the impossible."

They were silent.

Don Vigilio blew his nose emphatically.

"I have a message for you from Little Paganni."

"Really?"

"Here it is: 'Tell my friend the Signuri that my birthday is to-morrow. We're going to have meat to eat. If he cares to look in, let him say so without compliment, and I'll borrow another plate from fat Maria.'"

Sebastian laughed outright—for the first time in two months.

"He said that? Little rascal! And so I will, with a cake of seven pink candles, and frosted-sugar ornaments in the Syndic's best manner! . . . *Padre*, what are we going to do with that boy?"

"We must give him his chance, to be sure. We must show him where the world stands, these days. Then we must let him choose his place in it."

"Yes, I suppose we must let him choose that for himself!"

"Have no fear. One who has really been shown that truth always chooses well."

Out from the harbor, across the clear blue water, a small sail-boat was gliding, its lateen-sail translucent amber, its hull and spars pale-blue. Close to its bow, on the azure hull, there showed a dot of white—a painted eye, so that the fragile craft could safely see its way. Just so the boats of the ancients had been adorned, in the far-off dawn of civilization. In Torregiante, little, after all, had changed in all those centuries.

Said Sebastian:

"It is, indeed, one of the back-waters of the world, that the current has passed by. But if it hadn't been so, then the something different that it contains wouldn't be here still, to reach us others? A curious thing, that those who have always been here never feel it, that one must have come from without for that!"

"There is nothing we are so ignorant of as what we have always lived with."

The pale-blue sail-boat glided on toward the open sea. In the glassy, deep-blue water it left a wavering thin wake, of lighter hue, of the color of itself. Watching it, Don Vigilio mused:

"So we go on and on, leaving our unsteady wake, into the infinite. All our idleness in becalmments, all our tossing in tempests, have been incidents, to try us. We are the unsinkable vessel, the unalterable, immortal ship, always emerging, always faring on into the infinite. It isn't we who can see that harbor yet, for all our painted eyes. But we go toward it, nevertheless. We go toward it, that is certain!"

His quavering voice ceased—the voice of a gentleman, uttering those words with the accent and intonation of Rome, of the great world even, of regions of high birth and cultivation. Who had he been? Why was he here?

Sebastian fancied that he knew at least why Don Vigilio was here. But who he had been no doubt he would never know. He would never ask: and the old priest would hardly be likely to enlighten him.

"At any rate," said Sebastian, "now for a while we'll go forward without much wavering. We know what we have to do, here in Torregiante. You have tried. But we live in a material world, and our bodies and their welfare must be the foundation for the rest. For that part, fortunately I happen to be rich."

He waved his hand toward the village.

"We must change all that. To begin with, we must teach these people how to live physically. I owe the first respectable work of my life to Torre-

giante, for in Torregiante I first learned what money and brains are meant for. Afterward . . . But one thing at a time."

Then, for a long while they talked of practical things. The afternoon drew on. The rocky heights began to assume a warmer light. On the terrace, among the flowers, the bees were finishing their business. The old man leaned back in his chair and sighed.

"How beautiful it is up here! I hardly have the heart to forego the sunset."

"You're going to stay on to dinner. Ilario will take word to the parish-house that you're not coming. This evening, when the moon is up, Annibale will see you home."

"Well, I don't say no. The sunset from this headland——"

"And a mullet baked in onions, mushrooms, and tomatoes——"

"Eh, tempter! That wasn't necessary—but it settles it."

"And now I'll leave you to a nap. You might read yourself to sleep. Here's Kant, and Sainte-Beuve, and Anatole France, and Flaubert, and Carlyle, and Spinoza, and Alphonse Allais."

"*Diamine!* . . . What would you say if I chose—Anatole France?"

"Good enough! So, *arrividerci*."

"*Arrividerci*, my friend."

Sebastian went out into the ruddy sunset.

He took the path through the tangle of tree-

limbs, vines, and roses to the northern side. He walked along the cliff-path, came to the little valley, approached the temple.

From round it the sunlight had withdrawn already. The enclosing foliage, its upper part still filtering the crimson light, was thick, below, with purple shadows. The ancient ruin, hazy behind the first diaphanous veils of dusk, raised its mossy walls and flower-covered roof, softened to serious hues of green and violet, like something familiar yet wonderfully new, worn yet imperishable. Silence enclosed it. The birds, the bees, the breeze, were gone. From the purple-black doorway no slightest sound came forth. The voices of the Old Ones were still.

After a time, he went inside. Total darkness enveloped him: but he did not strike a light.

He stood before the low altar to "the Unknown God," grasping its edges, looking up toward where the inscription was carved across the wall. And, as though his eyes could read it, he repeated once more:

"To reach my altar, that part of you which you have loved best must be destroyed."

Had he not done that, indeed?

And from the ashes of that destruction had there not risen a fair, white thing, that did not pass away, but hovered before him, in light and darkness, continually, like the reflection of a star?

"But when shall I be satisfied to see only the reflection? Never?"

The echoes sprang back at him:

"Never!"

And, in the midst of the darkness, he seemed to see Saint Giosuè, as in the antique painting in the church, clad in a rough brown robe, but with an expression which that painting did not show—an expression of bafflement and failure. And the lips of Saint Giosuè seemed to move, and utter, in the voice of old John Elzevir:

“Man is but a part of himself, and woman is the other part. For that is Nature. . . .”

And the sanctuary was suddenly, as it were, thronged with thoughts in affirmation, with the thoughts of innumerable presences—as if the minds of a myriad departed beings had been conjured back by this illumination, to confirm it, in this spot where they had reached their highest exaltations, their most sublime and true perceptions.

Then, after a while, he became aware that he was not alone.

Some one was standing near him in the darkness.

A voice, low and tremulous:

“Sebastian?”

He whirled round, his heart in his throat. Two hands found his arms, and held them fast. A faint perfume reached him, how poignantly familiar!

And the low tremulous voice spoke again out of the darkness:

“I went to the villa. . . . Only Don Vigilio asleep. . . . Something told me you had come here. . . . I was alone. I had come all the way alone. No one knew I was coming. No one knows where I am. . . . No one knows what I have in my heart.

"The 'rational world'! It's up there, across the sea. I couldn't stay in it. They were good, but like shadows—kind shadows, that I hardly saw or heard. All the while I saw the rocks and the jungles thick with roses, and the sunset on the peaks—this other world, the 'irrational world,' that seemed to me the only rational one. The color and sounds and scents of the place where one awoke at last! For it was here that I awoke.

"But even from the beginning! From the first moment! Something stirred in me. And I was horrified, and fought against it. Yet that was necessary—all the uprising of defence, all the struggling, and the long reluctance. It was all necessary. Otherwise, there would have been no change. And we were meant from the beginning to change each other. To awaken each other. To make each other live. . . . So we were brought here, to this Isle of Life.

"Up there I understood it at last. I realized that I'd found what I had always been seeking. That all the anguish had only been leading me on toward it. That we're like little children, learning painfully, who can't see the object of their lessons, or the reward. . . .

"All my life I've felt that in the world there's but one man for one woman, one woman for one man. That they two should meet, at last, as if on a wind-swept mountain-top, all the world's ignoble rumors inaudible far below.

"The world! The world's what we choose it to

be. Above a certain point, there is no need of courage. One feels a touch of immortality. One greets one's destiny with open arms."

Her arms went round his neck. He felt her warm breath on his face. He heard her whispering:

"I love you. While I hated you I loved you. All the while, there was something in you reaching out toward me, something, amid all the rest, that was different from the rest, that my soul seemed to recognize beneath its encumbrances, that I was forced to love. And as the encumbrances began to fall away, as that part of you stood forth more clearly, I loved you more. And at last I saw nothing else. Only that. . . .

"Now I love you completely."

Her lips reached his. She clung to him like a creature all afire. She had, indeed, awaked at last. The world dissolved; and they rose together into the eternal spaces. . . .

Outside the temple, night had fallen. The trees stood forth in drooping silhouettes of purple against the water. Toward the horizon, the sea disappeared in silvery blankness, in which a black spot, the little fishing-boat, appeared and vanished, appeared and vanished. Close together, they still watched for it, when the sea had faded and concealed it. And at last, near where they had last seen it, a tiny point of flame glowed forth.

"It still goes forward."

"Yes, it still goes forward. . . ."

They returned to the villa.



In the dusky portico, Don Vigilio was sleeping, his calm old face upturned, his hands open, the book slipping from his knees. Sebastian looked into her eyes.

"Shall we wake him?"

She shook her head, and they went down through the black roses of the terrace to the brink.

Lights were springing up in Torregiante village. Round the beach they formed a glittering crescent. Never had the innumerable southern stars appeared more brilliant. Behind the thin, black bell-tower of the church the moon was rising.

"The heavens are putting out their highest beauty for your home-coming."

The first moonbeams, reaching across sea and land, rested on her face.

"My home-coming!"

Pressing against his arm, she murmured, in a voice choked with tears:

"Our Isle! If only all could find their Isle!"

And presently:

"I think they will. Sooner or later. Surely, all must find it, sooner or later? . . ."

When the moon stood higher, and everywhere was soft enchantment, they went back slowly, through veils of silver, to the villa.



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